GEORGE SAND'S NOVELS

Handy Library Edition

MONSIEUR SYLVESTRE



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BY

GEORGE SAND

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MONSIEUR SYLVESTRE,

THE HERMIT.

I.

To Philippe Tavernay,
Volvic (Puy de Dôme).

Paris, 2 February, 1864.

YES, my dear Philippe, it is true. I am ruined — that is, financially. My uncle, with his thirty thousand francs income, has given me his blessing, in terms which do not permit me to accept any longer the allowance he was pleased to make me, or the inheritance he promised to secure me. What terms? you will ask. Excuse me from repeating them. My dear uncle does not trifle. He used to be an iron-master, you know, and he still retains his former energy and habits of command. When roused, his anger comes down like a trip-hammer. It reminds me of the brute force with which one of those ponderous steam-hammers forges and fashions the metal placed beneath it. What though one be of iron, and have spent one's youth in getting a good temper! All solidity of character, all firmness of mind, all dignity, are crushed beneath the continued strokes of the unreflecting, absolute power. Unwilling to yield, I have been broken, declared good for nothing, and cast out among the refuse.

I am none the worse for it, Dieu merci! and am now free to choose my own path; which is no small satisfaction, I can assure you. I must even confess that, for some days, I have felt perfectly happy, and for the first time in my life. I go and come without object, I loaf, I breathe; it seems to me that my before-imprisoned soul expands itself and is renewed. I do not need to think of the morrow, for I have some hundreds of francs on which I can live while I look about, and I can give up the rest of the week to my final delicious *far-niente.*

Nevertheless, my uncle loves me, after his fashion; and I, too, love him, after mine. If he should withdraw his affection as well as his favors, I should be very sorry; but this does not seem to me possible. He must remember my attentions, my sincerity; he will miss me, will recall me, and I shall hasten to embrace him without delay and without rancor. Only he must not expect that I shall ever again become dependant on him. There is an end to that: I do not intend to fall into his possession again; I mean to belong to myself; I am almost twenty-five, and it seems to me that I have the right to consider myself of age, and to act accordingly.

You ask me what it was about; if it was about a marriage, again. You meant that for a joke. But it really was about a marriage, and for the third time. You know that when I was barely twenty-one he wanted me to marry a very rich blonde, and that I thought her too ugly. Two years later it was a brunette, not quite so rich, and by no means ugly, but of a tone so decided and a character so decisive, that I was at once repelled. Finally, last month, he proposed to me a *rossa;* very beautiful, I admit, for the prejudice against the *rosse* has been changed into one in their favor, in our artistic ideas, and I am of those who like to protest against the errors of the

past. Consequently, I had no objection to the color, and my uncle, who had been employing his best oratorical precautions to prepare me for a betrothed radiant with all the fires of Aurora, became himself radiant with joy, on my declaring that I liked red. But, alas! when I heard the name of the young person, I refused point blank. You would never guess who it was! It was the daughter of Mademoiselle Irène, who has an income of one hundred thousand francs, the result of her savings from the property of Messrs. A, B, C. . . . . you can add all the letters of the alphabet. Can you understand, my dear Philippe, how my uncle, an honest man, observant of the laws of his country, an officer of the national guard, décoré, an affiliate of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, etc. etc., could wish to enrich me by making me marry the daughter of a courtesan? I finally said that I was willing to make her acquaintance, and would even consent to marry her if she pleased me, but on condition that her mother should not give her even a chemise. Thereupon my uncle, who is deaf of that ear, and can see no stain on coined money, asked me if I was laughing at him, and threatened me with rather too paternal a correction. For some time past our discussions had assumed a form which tended to this disastrous conclusion. I laughed at his threat. That laugh made him furious, and I was really afraid that he would have a stroke of apoplexy.

In fact, I ought to have taken my present step some time ago; and, now that it is taken, there will be no drawing back, for I feel, by the delight of my conscience, that it is the right one. No! No man ought to be dependant on another man — even his own father. To be dependant, means to be obliged to obey another's will without examination. Unhappy are the children subject

to such dangerous control! Though I have always protested against it, I am no better off in consequence. I may have saved my honor and preserved my proper pride; but, in spite of all my efforts, I have been compelled to lose that tender respect and holy confidence which are the religion of our younger years. But why do I complain? I am like all of the generation to which I belong. If our struggle be not with our own personal relatives, it is with our *fathers*, in the general acceptation of the word; it is with that worship of money which was carried so far in the last generation. We are completely disgusted with the slavery of riches. Not that we are any the more saints in consequence; we don't pretend to dispense with the good things of this world, but we wish to acquire them for ourselves, without humiliation. What is there criminal, stupid, or horrible in this?

But I am preaching to a convert! Write to me — I was about to tell you where; but in fact I don't know. I left my uncle's house without taking anything that came to me from him. The little money in my pocket I received in pay for my anonymous vaudeville. I would have left my clothes, but that I was afraid of wounding his feelings; and now I am at a hotel. But, however modest my lodging may be, it is too dear for my present resources; and I, who have never known how to be economical, mean to be miserly henceforth. I do not wish to be reduced to utter destitution, and so give my uncle the pain of pitying me, or the pleasure of expecting me back.

You see that I am finishing my letter in a strain quite different from that in which I began it. I intended to write only of the pleasure of inhaling the pure air of freedom, and here I am already saying that I must seek a shelter and some means of livelihood. I do not want

you to offer me the least thing. You have your old relations to support, and your dear mother to keep in comfort: I should be robbing them. Therefore it is as well that you should not know where to write to me before I get established. That will be soon.

Yours affectionately,

PIERRE SORÈDE.

II.

From the Same to the Same.

Vaubuisson, 6 February, 1864.

HERE am I installed temporarily within a few miles of Paris, on the outskirts of a village — I might as well say in the open country, for I have absolutely nothing but trees and fields in view, as I write. They say that the landscape is pretty. I cannot tell, for it is raining in torrents, and I can hardly see the foreground. If the place be beautiful, so much the better; if not, so much the worse; for here I am, and here I shall stay, till I find the means of getting away.

Now as to the how and why I am here: I owed my tailor a trifle, and went yesterday to pay him.

"What! Pay me that? Already? What for? Do you mean to withdraw your custom?"

"Yes, my dear M. Diamant. Just now you are too dear for me. I am ruined from head to foot."

"Has your uncle died without making a will in your favor?"

"No! Happily he is well, but I have offended him, and have left him. Don't be anxious. I sha'n't blow out my brains. I even hope to return to you by and by. So, take your money, and au revoir."

"Stop!" said he, seizing me by the arm. "Come up stairs. I have something to say to you."

I followed him to his entresol; a low apartment, rather luxuriously furnished, in which an appetizing smell of dinner was somewhat generously perceptible.

"Is that you, M. Diamant?" cried a woman's voice. "Are you ready for dinner?"

"Yes, quite ready," replied the tailor to his other half. And he made me sit down, saying, with emphasis, "M. Sorède, you will partake of our soup?"

I could not help laughing. "Is it from friendship or charity that you ask me? If from friendship, I accept; if not, I assure you that I have enough to live on for more than a month."

"From friendship; and, if you refuse, I shall think that you despise us because we used to be work-people."

"I accept, my dear Diamant, I accept."

"Ah, that's right! Come, wife, let me present you. No! Put on another plate. Where are the children? Ah! Here they are! Make your bows to the gentleman. Aren't they pretty?"

The children were not pretty; but the good Diamant gave me so hearty a welcome, that I was not willing to undeceive him, and I took my seat with the family.

I saw what the good man was after: he was curious, with kind intentions, and wanted to find out why I had quarrelled with my uncle. I did not intend to tell him. If my uncle chooses to confess, or take credit for it, he may: that's his business; but I, who have been educated by his kindness, cannot tell any one, except you, that he has broken with me because I would not consent to a debasing marriage. I therefore asked the honest tailor not to question me. At first, I feared I had offended him by my reserve, for he became thoughtful; but, suddenly, at the end of the dinner, he said:

"M. Sorède, you are an honorable young man. You

do not wish to blame your benefactor. But I have fitted you for eight years, and I know you: you cannot have done anything wrong. In coming to pay me this balance, in your present destitution, you have performed a *superb action.*"

And, as I was about to protest against so extravagant an epithet,

"No! No!" he replied: "I insist on my expression. You have given me therein a proof of your affection. You said to yourself that I might have an unpleasant time with your uncle, if I should claim this little sum from him; he is irritable and suspicious — the dear man; and, to tell you the truth, I would rather lose the money than expose myself to an insult. Que voulez vous! I am *susceptible*, too. At any rate, you said to yourself, 'Diamant is an excellent man; he must not be troubled'; which shows that you thought of me, who am nothing to you, and whom, in your own troubles, it would have been very natural and very excusable in you to forget. That's a circumstance which I shall always remember. I appreciate it, and am not willing that we should separate without — without — your tasting my cognac. Oh! you don't know how good it is! Wife, go and get a bottle. You know: that Englishman's, who couldn't pay his bill, and turned his stock over to me, which satisfied me quite as well."

"That is not all," continued M. Diamant, as soon as his wife had gone. "What do you mean to do now? Get a place under government? That's the best. That confers more distinction on a young man, and you have friends who can easily procure one for you."

"No, M. Diamant. If possible, I do not wish to be dependant on any one, and prefer not to be a govern-

ment official. I wish to remain untrammelled in my opinions."

"Then you will go into business?"

"No! I should need capital to represent a personal responsibility, and I have none. I should feel uncomfortable in a salaried position."

"Ah! I see. You mean to be an author."

"Author or tailor, my dear Diamant, I want a free profession. I do not despise any, and can even admire those who, to fulfil a duty, surrender their personal liberty; but my poverty and isolation give me the right to choose. I therefore choose to work independently. It is but right that I should have the benefit of my poverty."

"Well said! Be an author, then; it is a fine calling. I saw your vaudeville; you sent me some good tickets. I took my wife; she liked the last verses very much, and she said, 'I am sure that M. Sorède is talented, in his way.' I am not a transcendent genius, but I believe that my wife was right. And, besides, I like you; and if you are to be anything, I shall not be sorry to have given you a helping hand. So I say: I am not a Crœsus, but if half a dozen thousand francs would be of service to you —"

I did not let him finish, but embraced him, and declined. He insisted all the more; and I had some difficulty in making him understand that, if I wanted to enjoy that freedom which is the only compensation for my precarious position, I ought not to begin by incurring the obligation of a debt.

Madame Diamant, who is a fat, common person at first sight, but really one of those generous and delicate souls whom opportunity reveals, showed a better appre-

ciation of my scruples, and enabled me to accept her husband's kindness under possible conditions.

"You are going to work," said she; "that is right: but you must not have to contend with too much poverty; for, if it be good to bear it bravely when it comes, it is not necessary to seek it when one can do otherwise. Now, will you let my husband and me undertake to make the little sum you have go a good way without its costing us a single sou?"

"Tell me how, Madame Diamant; good advice is a great service, and I shall be happy to accept something from you."

"Well! You spoke, at dinner, of going into the country; you said you liked the country at all seasons. Now, we have a small house at Vaubuisson, which we never go to except in summer, on Sundays. It is small, but neat, and the chimneys do not smoke. Take a chamber there. There is an old woman who airs it every other day. She will take care of your room for almost nothing. You can get your meals at a boarding-house in the village at three francs a day. Allow *so much* for your fuel, *so much* for your washing, and *so much* for incidentals. You will spend one hundred and fifty francs a month, and be quite comfortable; and you can go on so for three or four months without difficulty. Can you produce a work that will bring you in a thousand francs in four months?"

"I hope so."

"Then you will have enough for six months more; and, between now and then, the future will be clear for you."

The idea was an excellent one. I accepted; bought pens, ink and paper, and here I am.

I did not say good-by to anybody; having no wish to

talk about my family troubles. I do not want to complain, or to blame my uncle, nor do I want him to know where to find me. He would be sure to come after me, and then there would be a fresh difficulty in making him consent to my project of independence. When I can prove to him that I do not need his money, I shall have the right to reclaim his affection.

The rain has ceased while I have been writing, and the landscape has appeared; it is charming. Of course, there is not a single leaf on the trees, but an imperceptible swelling of the buds has removed the corpse-like rigidity of winter. In the foreground — that is, just beyond the little garden belonging to the house — a plantation of willows separates me from the river. This thicket of fine close branches has a tone which is indescribable; it is a something between green and yellow, which passes through all the shades of the Florentine bronze, and seems always gilded by the sun, even when there is no sun. The river is nothing but a stream which my horse — that is, the horse which is mine no longer — could easily clear at a jump. It flows so slowly that they call it *the dead river*. It is quite pretty, however: very winding, and enlivened by several washing-places and rustic little bridges. A road, also winding, traverses the broad meadows and cultivated fields, the character of which I cannot distinguish at this distance, but which are beautifully green; fields of violets, perhaps, for there is a perfume in the air, telling of the pleasant neighborhood of flowers, which Paris consumes so largely, from the poor man's one sou nosegays, to the rich and costly bouquets of the fashionable beauty.

Among these charming and fresh fields, the meandering banks of the river are planted with Lombardy poplars, of great height and uncommon elegance. The winds have

bowed them in different directions: one belt has bent under that from the west, but, at a little distance, an opening in the valley has exposed another clump to the east wind, and those beautiful colonnades, in double and triple rows, seem to be bowing to each other in dignified salutation.

Beyond, the land swells gently, and is covered with round-headed apple-trees, the branches of which are so dark and close that, even without leaves, they present an impervious obstacle to the eye. A few scattered cottages show their roofs at the foot of a hill, and then the hill rises sharply behind, and closes the horizon with a sweetly undulating line, crowned with vegetation. All the hill is a wood of some extent, not very thick, with graceful variations, some cleared openings, individual trees higher than the mass, sunken ravines, patches of heath, and a few young dark green pines. For one moment, a pale attempt of the sun cast a satiny light upon all these little mysteries; then, suddenly, the whole melted away in a soft mist, and the hill became lilac, while the great bare trees of the middle ground showed white, like clouds. The nearest ones, with their finely-cut black spray, gave distance to the vague and charming picture, which soon disappeared. Then the rain began again, and everything was veiled and lost; there was no more hill, there were no more apple-trees; the fields became blue, and the sandy road looked white and shiny, like the river.

Good-night, my friend. I am very comfortable. My fire is burning bright. I am going to think of working. You *can* write, you *must* love me.

PIERRE.

III.

From Philippe Tavernay to Pierre Sorède.

Volvic (Puy de Dôme), 10 February, 1864.

I CANNOT help feeling anxious. Shall you, can you, will you, live in such a manner for the requisite time? It would be an excellent arrangement, doubtless, if you were fifty years old, and had a recognized talent and an established reputation. To retire to the country in mid-winter, in order to seek solitude and concentrate one's self, when in the full tide of success, is a charming idea; but what are you, with your twenty-five years, going to do in such a solitude, within one hour of Paris — that is, with hell at your very door?

I know very well that you pretend to be the most positive of the young men of your time, and that you consequently ridicule the notion that there can be any danger in attractions of the heart and the imagination. I am quite willing to believe that the strength of your will and your pride are equal to your programme; but then there are the senses, which cannot thus be extinguished at the command of reason, and ennui is sure to follow the inactivity of our instincts. Do you intend to macerate yourself like an anchorite, or to take, as companion, some hermit of your own type? I have never heard that they were very numerous in the neighborhood of Paris, and I cannot imagine any one wandering in storm and rain

through those swampy fields, or under those leafless apple-trees, without getting abominably muddied, at the very least; which is far from poetical.

Joking apart, it is not possible for you to keep on in this way; you, who have so recently quitted, if not the higher elegancies, at least the charming facilities of Parisian life. A strong fever for work might, indeed, make everything possible; but how will you get such a fever? You have never known it; it has never attacked you; you have never been compelled to count the hours, or to accomplish a given task in a limited time. In a word, you have never had to perform any duties except towards yourself. I acknowledge that you have performed these as well as possible. You might have been a frivolous libertine; you always had money enough to enable you to commit follies and to incur debts. M. Piermont would have paid for all. Your dear uncle loves and respects money, it is true; but what he loves still more, is an accordance with his ideas; and if you will only proclaim that you worship money, you can practise prodigality to his face. Are not rich heiresses created and brought into the world for the express purpose of repairing the breaches which a fast young man may have made in his patrimony?

But you were not willing to be compelled to have recourse to ugly, passionate, or *ill-born* heiresses. The blonde, the brunette and the rossa displayed their charms before you in vain. You could resist them, because no tailor, no lorette, no horse-jockey held a mortgage on your honor and your freedom.

You have so respected yourself, that your uncle considered you too prudent, and called you coward and pedant. You did more than deserve the intended insult, which honored you. You did not wish to be ignorant; there-

fore you studied, and your acquirements are solid as well as extensive. Your intellect is a good one, and acquisition has cost you no trouble, as you were the free possessor of all the hours of your day, and no one demanded board or lodging from you. But now that you will have to provide these for yourself, besides a thousand other things with which you have not learned to dispense, how will you be able to ward off want by forced, sustained, heroic labor? Does poverty suddenly accomplish such miracles for those who have had no acquaintance with her? I do not say that she does not, but you must permit me to be anxious.

If I only knew what kind of work you intend to undertake! But you yourself do not appear to know. You will not, I trust, begin another vaudeville. You know that I never flatter, and that yours seemed to me labored, wanting in fancy, and consequently tiresome. The public were evidently of the same opinion, as they accorded to it only a moderate success. You have too much pride to descend to clap-trap, and this is required on the stage in whatever line, especially in our day, when we have become so disgusted with everything that demands reflection.

Have you any imagination? I really do not know. You have a certain poetic faculty; but as to invention? In order to be a romancer, one must be romantic. Now, it seems to me that, in devoting yourself exclusively to the positive view of all things, you must, unwittingly, have smothered in yourself the germ of other possibilities, and have destroyed that of the sweet hypotheses which give vividness to our conception of the real. You have never really lived in yourself; and when you come to look for the ideal side of life, in order to describe it, the devil take me if I know where you will find it in

IV.

From Pierre to Philippe.

Vaubuisson, 15 February, 1864.

YOU are really the best of fellows and the tenderest of friends. Yes, I will go and spend some time with you, but you must let me first try solitude for awhile. If I find it injure me in the least, I promise you that I will not persist.

But don't doubt my courage too much. I can't afford not to believe in it. I have often asked myself how I should bear poverty in case my uncle compelled me to leave him — for I have more than once thought of doing what I have just done. You see, therefore, that I am not taken unawares. It is true that, as I never expected, nor have been accustomed to earn my living, I have not your strength, and that factitious wants have been created in me; in fine, that I am not an experienced man like you, who can say, " I know myself, I belong to myself, I can guide myself." Nevertheless, I have at least been able to restrain, to govern and prepare myself, like a horse who is in training for the turf; and reflecting, as I frequently did, upon the possibility which is now a fixed fact, I traced out my path as an adventurer — for such I now am. As I am either too well or too imperfectly educated to be qualified for an official career, I must perforce be the artificer of a yet unknown future — I must enter upon it for better or for worse. It is my first duty to

keep myself worthy, but I must incur all risks, and accept them from the very start.

The journey of exploration through literature has always been very attractive and seductive to me. I am no longer a child who *dreams of glory*, or who is consumed by the desire of fame. Far otherwise; the being talked about is in my eyes a great drawback — an obstacle in the way; and, if I were sure of a great success, I should prefer to be strictly anonymous. What tempts me most is the independence of thought, which can treat of everything, the variety of subjects which a little talent can mould at will, the untrammelled contact with truth, the free search after the real in the ideal, or after the ideal in the real, according to the nature and tendency of the mind which applies itself to the subject. The more I think of it, the more I am convinced that this is the most delightful employment of the human faculties, and the real paradise of the intellect. Such an ambition came naturally to a boy who was rather spoiled as regards material comforts, and who could bide his time, and try the pulse of the public by very humble and unimportant essays. While doing this, I also strove to acquire some intellectual wealth, but determined that I would commit myself at as late a period as possible. Now, I can delay no longer; whether ripe or not, the fruit must be plucked and sent to market. This, you say, is the sad view of the matter — why should it not be the pleasant one? As regards earnings, I want only what is barely necessary, and it does seem to me that I have in myself wherewithal to obtain superfluities. I may be mistaken, but that is of no consequence. I have a great deal of pride and no vanity. If I be a dry literary fruit — if I cannot produce a drama, criticism, or romance, better than my vaudeville, I shall only laugh, I assure you, and

it will then be time to make use of my Latin, my mathematics, and whatever other acquirement may enable me to become a professor, at two or three thousand francs salary — the maximum of my cupidity.

Then let me start on my literary adventure into the *beautiful region of romance*, without being troubled about the horse that carries me. If my positivism prove too restive a hobby, we will change it for some other steed, and be neither vexed nor discouraged.

But who knows if I be positive by nature? You doubt it. You think that I am only intentionally so. That is possible: I open my arms to this truth which attracts me, and which appears to me to be the light of my century; but I have poetic tendencies as well. I like to dream, and there is nothing to prevent my depicting the combats of a contemplative mind with the theories which excite and attract it. One thing I am certain of: that in the complete solitude in which I now live, in this lonely house, exposed to all the winds of winter, with the solemn feeling of my social isolation and of my recovered freedom, my ideas present themselves under serene and smiling forms. Expression does not trouble me; it comes without effort. I do not know what order may develop itself in my brain; a soft light environs me. Nothing disturbs me, and the form which my work may take is the least of my cares. For instance: what I have just written, at this moment, is it not worth being said? It now interests nobody but you: so be it; but if it be the groping of a really earnest mind about to take its flight into the unknown space which it would measure, it becomes the basis of ideas tending towards an object, and thenceforward is interesting, if not generally, at least collectively — for my little personal experience is certainly identical with that of many others; I am not the only

one who, in a single day, has found himself cast, without resources and without support, into the great maelstrom of the world. I am not the only man who, having lost caste, can declare himself innocent of the disaster which has befallen him, and who brings untried powers and a clear conscience to the building up of a civilization which will remain perfectly indifferent to his failure, if he fail; but be always ready to enrich itself with whatever he may contribute, if he really do contribute anything.

Suppose, then, that the letters which I write to you were the opening of a romance, how could I proceed in any other way if I were writing a fiction? I should not make use of any more pretence, any more rhetorical flourishes, any more emphatic expressions, and it would have at least one merit, that of probability and sincerity.

You see that I shall not have to force my subject. I will develop the first idea that may present itself; and, if the development do not come naturally, I shall say that the idea is not a correct one, and shall seek for another.

You don't like, I am sure, the phrase, *The first idea that may present itself*. Well, that is merely a form of words: it has presented itself, and I have begun to digest it. It will become philosophy, criticism, romance, or drama, according to the features it may assume. At present it is merely a matter of consideration. I wait until it shall be developed, before determining upon the garment in which it can best be presented.

The rain has not ceased during the week I have been here. The roads have not had time to dry, and I have not been tempted to wade through the wet fields. The disagreeableness of walking with effort and precaution, would probably spoil the pleasing impression produced by the view of the pretty landscape. I look at it from my

window at all hours: it is always pretty, and sometimes splendid. It is, however, a limited view, without much variety — a rural nature, the principal characteristics of which are serenity and sweetness. There is nothing dramatic about it; it could not engender Shakesperean or Dantesque thoughts. It is a charming idyl which lulls the mind and chants to the imagination. Over the whole there broods a silence which I had not thought possible so near to Paris. I am especially impressed by the attitude of the tall poplars, which, entirely naked to a third of their height, gracefully sway their delicate tops at the least breath of wind. They give one an idea of distinction and of sympathizing benevolence. It seems as if one must expect to meet, under their clear shade, in summer, with white-robed nymphs, half princesses, half shepherdesses, of kind, though melancholy aspect, allowing themselves to be gazed upon without prudery, willingly conversing, in a low voice, with those who may pass by, and yet not permitting any familiarity or foolish trifling.

Is it not strange that I should have fallen at once, and by mere accident, into the midst of a nature so congenial? There are thousands of richer and more striking places than this around Paris, but my walks have never led me to discover any presenting less the aspect of an approach to a great city. One could here imagine himself in a desert freshly occupied by man. The long hill which encloses it seems like a primeval forest renewing its foliage; and the undulating valley, which, in its greatest extent, is at most a league wide, possesses a certain grandeur which reminds one of a virgin prairie. The trees are not placed symmetrically: every proprietor having evidently planted in the most favorable spots, and thus unintentionally concurred in the composition of a

whole of admirable effect. If there be villas concealed behind certain masses, I know nothing of them; all that appears of the few dwellings I can see is, from its rustic simplicity, in harmony with the landscape. Directly under my eyes there are, indeed, some white walls which cut unpleasantly across the vegetable gardens of the neighborhood; but, in summer, they must all be covered with verdure. These are the last juttings of the village behind me. Beyond them begin the willows; and in all the rest there is not a harsh line, not an unfortunate angle, not an apparent enclosure. The different zones of cultivated land melt pleasantly together as they recede, and the more distant planes disappear towards evening in a misty tone of exquisite beauty.

I delight in restricted views. They, only, convey to me an idea of the Infinite. A great open space reveals too many things which must resemble those we see clearly, while the smallest wooded height which prevents the passage of the eye, permits us to dream of the unknown which lies beyond it. What do I know of the country beyond this confined horizon? Is it a vast plateau of arable land? Is it the prolongation of that waving forest? Is it a deep ravine, a precipice? I am free to imagine whatever pleases me. This is the reason why I do not like to hear about the other life. If I believed in it, I should prefer not to have it detailed to me. I do not believe in it; but when a dream of childhood brings that sweet fancy back to me, I wish to imagine it for myself, and do not like to have it depicted to me through the absurd or prosaic imagination of any modern Swedenborg. This has the same effect on me as if a man, perched on the top of the tower of Montlhéry, should cry out, "You see those plains, those woods, those cities, those chateaux? Well, beyond, it is exactly the same

thing." Many thanks! I prefer the unknown. This word does no violence to my reason, and does not extinguish every spark of poetry in my brain.

This, also, is why I have not yet yielded to my desire to take a stroll in those rare hours when the sun has invited me. I fear to discover some ugly or ridiculous details in this charming valley, and not to be able to forget them when I return to my view of the whole. I know that this fear does not harmonize with my realistic theory, that we ought to accept everything in nature as we do in life, and be able to depict the horrors of a slaughter-house with the same pleasure — the pleasure of an approving conscience — as the sweetness of a flower-garden. If you were here, you would improve the opportunity, and tell me again that I am no positivist. I should be obliged to confess that my instincts are in revolt against my beliefs. So much the better, since this is the theme on which I wish to exercise myself for my first appearance.

Present my most tender regards to your mother.

V.

From Pierre Sorède to M. Piermont.

THIS letter will have no post-mark, my dear uncle, and you must forgive me for not sending you my address; but I want to relieve you from all anxiety respecting me. I know that you love me, even when you cannot endure me, and I have no right to pain you, though you may have pained me. I write, therefore, to tell you that I am well, that I want nothing, that I do not feel, and never shall feel, the least temptation to suicide, or to any extreme measure which could afflict you or cause you to blush for me. Do not think me indifferent to matters which concern you. I hear of you indirectly, and I do not neglect to inquire. Forgive me, if you can, the disappointment I have felt obliged to cause you, and do not doubt my heartfelt gratitude for the kindnesses which you have heretofore lavished upon me.

VI.

From Pierre to Philippe.

Vaubuisson, 20 February.

I FINALLY decided to quit my cave. My legs really wanted to walk. They carried me along at will, and I soon discovered that, although the road from my door to the washing-place is much cut up, miry and disagreeable, the sandy paths through the open fields are clean and pleasant. I was making the highly philosophical reflection that my shoes would last a good while on such easy roads, when I unexpectedly found myself in a park which encloses a depression in the hill on my left, and extends on the other side to quite a comfortable-looking villa. I don't like to walk between four walls, and yet we must all desire the preservation of those old parks, in which centenary trees are protected from the axe: any country devoid of this luxury, will probably be completely denuded some day. I was leisurely admiring a remarkably beautiful alley of lindens, all equal in height and size, when I suddenly found myself face to face with Louis Duport. There was no possibility of avoiding him, or escaping from his questions.

"What the devil are you doing here?"

"And you, yourself?"

"Oh! I," said he, "I've come to Gédéon's, who's away, to get — but you'll laugh. Only imagine, my dear

fellow, I'm in love — I really believe that I'm going to be married. *The person* had a fancy for some rare flower — I don't know the name, I can't remember it; but I wrote it down, and went through all the florists in Paris — Not to be had! At last, by mere accident, Gédéon said, 'I have it at my country place. Go and get it.' That's why I'm here. Now it's your turn to tell me. Have you come to get a flower for your beloved, too?"

"I have no beloved. Tell me about yours. As you are going to marry her, there can be no indiscretion in my asking her name."

You know, my dear Philippe, that our friend Louis Duport is a good deal of a babbler — rather simple withal — but a good fellow, nevertheless, who likes nothing better than a talk about himself. So I succeeded for some time in preventing him from talking about me; but, when he had sufficiently expatiated upon the beauty, wit and fortune of his betrothed, I was recalled to his memory in the most unexpected manner.

"By the by," he cried, "you asked me for her name. You know her; you wanted to marry her two years ago."

"You're mistaken. I never wanted to marry any one."

"Allons donc! It's Mademoiselle Nuñez, that beautiful dark Jewess, the cousin of Gédéon Nuñez, whose place this is."

"Ah, yes! I do remember her. I've seen her two or three times; but I swear that I never authorized my uncle to propose for me. I was much too young to marry."

"Good!" replied Duport, with a rather impertinent smile. "All right! That's the way to put it! But you oughtn't to feel mortified at having been refused, my dear

fellow; the family didn't consider you rich enough, that's all; it's no fault of yours. As to Rebecca — I mean Mlle. Nuñez — she didn't consider you at all; knowing nothing of your proposal, she consequently didn't notice you."

"Then she was wrong; she ought to have noticed an original whom neither her beauty nor her fortune could captivate, and who has hitherto been fool enough to prefer his liberty to those two attractions, so irresistible to most men."

"Do you know that you talk as if you were vexed?"

"If I am vexed, it is with you, whom I have just told that I never authorized any proposal, and who seem inclined to offend me by doubting my word."

"I don't in the least mean to offend you, and I think you're devilish punctilious. Suppose you had been refused? What of it? I've been refused ten times, and I assure you that I don't feel at all provoked with the families who didn't think I was what they wanted."

"Well! I've never been refused. There's the difference."

"Ah! you take it rather haughtily, it seems to me, and I begin to believe that Rebecca — I mean Mlle. Nuñez — judged you rightly, for I had quite a dispute with her about you the other day."

"Ah!"

"Yes, my dear fellow. You see I was imprudent enough to boast of being your friend. Well! she almost quarrelled with me. She maintained that you were supercilious and obstinate, a straight-laced philosopher, a disciple of Proudhon, an infidel, and what not; for she is very religious, very Catholic, as the baptized Jews generally are. But no matter! she's charming, and devilish witty. She laid you out, I can tell you. But

that makes no difference, I love you all the same; and when she's my wife I'll undertake to reconcile you, on condition that you respect her belief."

"Oh! Then we've got to be reconciled? How's that, if she never noticed me?"

Poor Louis, taken in *flagrante delicto* of falsehood or inconsistency, felt rather uncomfortable, was sorry that he had opened his heart to me, and in a hurry to get away. He ventured a few questions, which I easily evaded, and then said au revoir, without asking why I was no longer seen in Paris — which proves to me that my absence has not yet been remarked. Happy Paris! the abode of carelessness, of the *incognito*, and consequently of freedom! I fear that it is not the same thing here, and that, with all its delusive appearance of an American prairie, my desert may not conceal me as well as the first corner of a street opening upon the Boulevard.

I further conclude from this conversation that Mlle. Rebecca Nuñez entertains a spite against me for my want of gallantry, and that, when she becomes Mme. Duport, she will manage to embroil me with her husband, with her cousin Gédéon, and all the Nuñez in the world. Well! I care little; I am only moderately attached to them, but, as she is pious, I shall have both church and synagogue against me.

Thank God! I no longer belong to that clique nor to any other. Once freed from the bonds of caste, I have no desire to resume them. I wish to live as a pantheist and a social eclectic.

Just now I live entirely alone, by myself; for the inn is too far off, and my old housekeeper finds her little profit in enabling me to live more economically here. I have not the shadow of a neighbor. A broad plain, surmounted by a round hill, terminates the valley on my left, while on

the right quite an extended region of cabbages and artichokes separates me from the village. I catch a glimpse of the first roofs of a smaller village at some distance, almost in front; the rest are hidden by a swell in the ground. Further off, exactly in front, some kind of small dwelling, almost covered by the trees, and just at the foot of the hill — say half a league off as the crow flies — sends a sparkle into my eyes about two o'clock; it comes from a narrow window, which reflects the pale sun just for a moment. That white star, piercing through the boughs, occupies and interests me. Who can be living there, in an isolation still more complete than my own — for the cottage seems buried in the wood. It is not a peasant, so far as I can judge. And yet, why not? The hovel is a myth in this fruitful region, and that roof of red tiles has nothing seigniorial about it. I suspect, however, that it must be the house of a singular personage, whom I have more than once seen at a distance since the weather became a little finer, and whom I met this morning as I was coming home by the bank of the river. He is an old man, still quite erect, probably bald under the black silk cap which he wears drawn close down to his ears, and topped by a hat of the fashion of 1830. A black frock-coat of the same date, and prodigiously threadbare, serves as a sheath to his thin body, the legs of which are so slender that, when seen in profile, he looks like a heron standing on one leg. Standing motionless on the bank of the stream for hours, he seems to be watching for his prey; and his long, prominent nose is not unlike a beak ready to dive beneath the water. To-day, it being really fine, I discovered that he was a fisherman, for he had his pole with him. On other days, apparently judging that it was useless to fish in the muddy water, he was content with looking at the flowing stream, and taking observations

for future use. This good man — for he is a good man, I am sure — must have a passion for his art, and I shouldn't wonder if he were past-master in it. I felt greatly inclined to speak to him, for his agreeable face seemed to invite my advances. He has the handsomest eyes you can imagine — large, round, black, full — with a wild and gentle fire, like those of the hunting-birds, whom we call ferocious, because they obey the most innocent of instincts, that of self-preservation. In spite of this flash of the animal, his air is intelligent, refined, and possibly a little crazy. His long nose is that of an enthusiastic, persevering seeker; and his mouth, under a still black mustache, is charmingly kind and delicate. He smiled upon me as if we were acquainted, which compelled me to bow to him, and he replied verbally to my salutation, like a man who wishes to talk. I was touched by his open and paternal physiognomy, but I restrained myself, and passed on without response; for I felt that, as I will not satisfy the curiosity of others, I have no right to be curious myself.

I was so, nevertheless, and, as soon as I got home, opened my window, to see which way he went. He stayed a long while, but, at last, picking up his basket, whether full or empty, went off in the direction of the mysterious cottage, whose daily and fugitive sparkle questions or calls me. But this is pure hypothesis, and I let my pen run on about these trifles, rather to practise myself in fixing my reveries, hitherto somewhat confused, than to attempt the solution of a problem to which I cannot attach the least importance. You must forgive my prolixity, however, because every circumstance, even the most trivial, helps me on in the question to which I devote my hours of work. Have I told you what it is? I believe not, and it is time I did.

"What is happiness?" That is the question. Queer, isn't it? that on the day after a little catastrophe which cast me headlong into the midst of circumstances the most perilous and most disquieting in life — the loss of present means and absolute uncertainty about the future — the first idea which came to me was the wish to analyze an abstraction in which man places his ideal of plenitude and certainty. Do not believe that there is any ostentation of stoicism in the case. By no manner of means. It came to me from the fact of feeling myself, I will not say happy, because I do not know how long the impression will last, but joyous, content, confident; in a state of mind, in fine, which I had never before experienced, which I did not look for, and of which I had never had even a glimpse.

Perhaps it was because I have always been unhappy, without knowing it. I did not think so; this would have been ridiculous in me, seeing my lot materially preferable to that of so many others who were fully my equals; but I now remember indistinctly that I suffered ten times a day, and every day, from my dependance as regarded others and myself. My uncle's temper is tyrannical; I can see that I was aware of this, and that his violence made me, by reaction, extremely circumspect. I avoided the slightest collision with great care, but it is also true that the constant expectation of such a collision prevented me from breathing and living freely. And, besides, the life he made for me, my relations with others, my surroundings, my occupations, were never of my own free choice. I like the unforeseen, and could never yield myself to it. The fear of misemploying a position which I knew to be precarious, because I was determined to break away at the first serious assault upon my conscience, made me sceptical and anxious. I felt fet-

tered in all my wishes; upon all the paths of my most innocent fancies or most legitimate inclinations, I saw that petty and absurd obstacles awaited me, confronted and repelled me. I was obliged to keep my convictions concealed like mysteries, and to be always prepared, in case a cry escaped my soul, to hear my benefactor call me ungrateful, and my frivolous companions treat me as crazy. This was not living, in any true sense, for everything became a burden, and I felt debased by a secret disgust of myself. I tried to get rid of this feeling of suffocation by work, and had to contend for my time with idle friends, or with what is called — God knows why — my duties to society; as if it were a duty to be bored by people whom you cannot amuse! My work, incessantly interrupted, never encouraged, became sterile, and as I often told you and wrote to you, especially in the last two years, I felt the want of an impulse which I could not find. You always said that what I needed was to fall in love. I believe that you were mistaken, because I never have loved, have never thought of loving, and yet here I am restored to the full possession of my will. Can happiness consist in the complete possession of one's self in an intellectual and moral sense? I do not mean entire freedom of action; that is impossible in poverty, and even does not appertain to this earth. If a man wants to walk forward in a straight line, there must be neither rivers, nor precipices, nor cultivated grounds in his way. There is no need of a Niagara; a simple potato-patch is sufficient to compel the lover of a straight course to make a notable deviation. Therefore we are not free, even in the material sense, and there is nothing revolting to me in the fact. The victory of the mind over the unavoidable obstacle of fact is the true mission of man, and without the impulse of

VIII.

From Pierre to Philippe.

Vaubuisson, 29 February, 1864.

YOU have a great heart, my dear Philippe, but I doubt if you be a great philosopher. You dispose of my question very easily, but your simple solution is not new. You will say that it is always consoling; but is philosophy a poultice for our wounds, or the disinterested search after absolute truth?

I admit that happiness requires certain fundamental conditions, and, first of all, to be content with one's self. The criminal, the coward, the hardened egotist, have no right to happiness, as we understand it; but who knows how they understand it? Who knows but they dare to call and believe themselves happy, when their miserable instincts are satisfied?

Well! we need not count these; but, between those whom remorse ought to disturb, but does not, and those who, like you, taste the sublime joy of duty fulfilled, there is the immense majority of men, and it is for these, and not for exceptions, that the rule is required. May I not say that there is no rule absolutely true for extreme natures, whether good or bad? And does it not appear to you that they escape the common law, — that they pass beyond the just measure, and that we must neither con-

demn nor admire, immoderately, any of those exuberant, exceptional organizations?

Once more: Let us assume that happiness, like virtue and like vice, is a pure abstraction, or, if you prefer, the ideal type of a thing which does not exist in nature, except in the state of fugitive transports, or of more or less impotent aspirations. Then I say: the more virtues a man has, the more virtuous he is, and the more vices, the more vicious; but a completely virtuous or a completely vicious being has never yet been clothed with the human form, and never can be; so that, when humanity felt the need of producing or inventing that impossible being, it made either a god or a devil.

Don't get vexed: An abstraction is a good thing when it is the type of an ideal which we hope to resemble. Though I go in for the positive, I do not reject the ideal; but I cannot bear those ingenious, amiable, generous, accommodating philosophers, who tell us: "Happiness is Philosophy." They might as well say: "Philosophy is Happiness." I don't doubt it. The study of the true and the good is a delightful occupation; but, like all the gratifications of this world, a trifle disturbs it, a headache drives it away, a dry, compulsory work forbids it, a pain, even a duty, turns us from it. No! Man possesses nothing which he can make enduring for himself or others, and happiness is but a word.

A great word, I confess, but a great lie, if we insist on taking it literally. It is therefore for the purpose of denying the existence of absolute happiness, of destroying a fatal error, of weighing conscientiously the value of really good things, and of teaching men to appreciate them truly, that I wish to publish the ideas which present themselves to my mind. Shall I succeed? It is

easy enough to fill pages, but it is difficult to fix the flash of truth; for, say what we may, truth is but a jet of light, and we cannot make a sun of it.

Your fine philosophy is only too easily controverted. For instance: can you tell me why, fulfilling, as I did, all the duties incumbent on me until now, I did not feel happy until I abjured them in order to create others? If duty be relative, then happiness is relative also. If it be relative, it cannot be absolute. There are duties which, when fulfilled, confer it; there are others which deprive us of it.

"Practise justice," said the ancients. What justice? Has not human justice changed entirely since the days of Plato and Aristotle? "Obey the laws." Where are the laws that are durable? What has become of the duties of the slave? And, besides, if you talk about justice, morality, virtue, you are talking about everything except happiness; you are confounding the work with its recompense; and, if you make the one a consequence of the other, your calculation transcends all proportion; for the greatest and noblest human work being always incomplete, has no right to an absolute recompense.

Those religious teachers who have placed absolute happiness in a life beyond this, did not see any more clearly than did the pagan moralists. Their calculation about recompense is, moreover, an impossible one. What! All eternity without a cloud to be had in pay for a few hours' brave endurance of the storm! Really, that is getting the infinite altogether too cheap! If men really believed this dream, they would never have swerved from the path of rectitude, and we should all be angels now. But he who tries to prove too much, proves nothing; and this doctrine has never influenced any but

exceptional enthusiasts and exuberant souls. It has become a merely selfish calculation on the part of the mass of believers, and the number of saints and martyrs can be counted on the almanac, even after leaving out the forty days which the church reserves for God and the Virgin.

I hear you say, "Where are you going? Sophistry is misleading you. You felt happy at a given moment of your life; you were struck by the sensation as by a discovery, and now you are trying to find a definition of that which you experienced. That is all right, but you begin by denying it. Where are you going, my poor Pierre? Where are you going?"

Isn't that so? Didn't you say that? For my part, I consider myself quite logical. I have a sense of well-being, a kind of sweet and tranquil joy, in the possession of myself; I say: "This is Happiness! Welcome, unaccustomed guest! Allow me to examine your face, to question you, to test your power and your constancy. But I am a child of my century: a seeker and a sceptic. Do not mistake my hearty welcome for a blind idolatry. I know very well that you are fugitive, and that, like the Wandering Jew, you cannot stay your steps with me or with my neighbor. You are a thing of this world, my amiable guest, a human thing; you cannot promise Paradise to me; you know no more about it than I do; and perhaps I know you too well, for I can see that you are nothing more than a creation of my thought, a state of my mind, a breath, a shade, a perfume."

Well! It may be that this state of the soul depends on me individually, or on certain outward circumstances; it may be interior or exterior, and perhaps I shall succeed in ascertaining which. In either case, if I do

succeed, I shall grasp the formula — the recipe, if you choose — and will communicate it to others. They will make such use of it as they please. I can always be sure that it will do them no harm, for I shall practise no empiricism. Away with all panaceas! I care not even for those which may be beneficial, if they be not true.

IX.

From Philippe to Pierre.

Volvic, 5 March, 1864.

YES, you are very sincere, and there is some good even in your sophistry; but don't discuss your idea too much; write your book. I do not wish to contradict you, for fear of pushing you to extremes in your argument. There is danger of that. When you shall have come to a definite conclusion, you will let me contest it, if it do not persuade me.

My patient has died, but I have no time for sorrow. I have another still struggling with the same disease, and must not lose my hopefulness. Any diminution of my strength would react on him.

Happiness is not a purely personal matter: there is a reciprocal relation from within to without, and from without to within. We will enlarge upon this at a future time, for here, I think, is the key of the problem.

Continue to write me long letters — they are my recreation, my solace, when I get back from dragging my ball and chain. All your reasoning will not give me any idea of a happiness from which you are excluded.

X.

From Pierre to Philippe.

Vaubuisson, 7 March, 1864.

YOU are right: we must talk, and not discuss. If I were to read my work to you every day, perhaps I should get infatuated, and you are wise in warning me against passionate convictions. I believe that earnest seekers should not start on the search after truth with the desire to make every reflection bear in favor of a pre-determined conclusion: this would shut out any light which might break forth on the way. Truth is certainly worth the sacrifice of any provision we may have made for our voyage after it. Let us talk then, since it pleases you; it does me good: I am no longer alone when I am writing to you. Do not suppose that my voluntary isolation is becoming irksome to me. I have spent a day in Paris, and found myself more alone there than here. I was compelled to show myself, for I felt sure there would be some stupid or foolish story afloat about my disappearance, and I was not mistaken. Some said that I had been carried off by a wife; others that I had killed a husband. There was one version about my suicide, another about my departure for America. Owing to my uncle's inconsiderate anger, it is known that we have quarrelled, and I was generally supposed to be either

furious or despairing. Happily, the cause of our difference remained a matter of conjecture, and I was let off on saying that he had wanted me to marry, and that I had an aversion to marriage. I further said that I had in view a very good place on a railroad, which I had the promise of, and that I was travelling about in order to get acquainted with its duties before entering upon them. I told this lie in order to prevent my friends from being anxious about my situation, and to escape from some offers of service—not, in general, very brilliant or pressing, I must say — but principally to avoid betraying the secret of my work or of my retreat. I cannot imagine anything more stupid, than for me, who have not given the least proof of talent as yet, to say that I am writing a book. I laugh in thinking of the faces that would have been made at such an announcement, and at the naively discouraging remarks: "Really? You're going to write? Do you know how? Have you ever tried? Do you think you have any talent? It's very difficult, and so many people break down! It's a profession in which you must be everything or nothing!" etc., etc.

I saved myself from the storm of commonplaces by saying nothing to provoke it, and by asking for information from others without giving them time to question me. In those few hours I learned one thing that was new to me: that there is nothing more easy than not to excite the least interest in those who call themselves our friends. Friendship, indeed! There's another pure abstraction of which we make blotchy sketches. Do not think me ungrateful; I do love you, and you only, and I love you as much as I can love. I feel that you are an exception to the general rule, and I am happy to have met with you; if I should lose you, I could not hope to find, and would not look for another.

I already knew through Diamant, who makes clothes for one of my uncle's friends, that the dear uncle was well, and I assured myself of the fact. I learned that Louis Duport was married to Mlle. Nuñez, and that this amiable person attributes my quarrel with M. Piermont to my having lectured him about his old mistress; whereupon he had cuffed me soundly, and turned me out of doors: "And served him right," adds the benevolent Rebecca.

Arthur and André asked me to dine with them at Magny's. The animal in me was tempted to accept. The thought of eating something savory, of drinking something exhilarating, after a month of Spartan regime, made my mouth water; but on reflecting that I had not the means of doing the same by my comrades, I silenced the brute, pretended an engagement, and went to share the *soup of the heart*, as he terms it, of my friend Diamant. I do not feel ashamed of my poverty there. Those people are true and good. I thought them stupid because they say stupid things; but it is a habit they have of talking nonsense, just as we talk parodoxes in our pretended world of wit. Folly for folly, commonplaces are more easily digested than sophisms; they do not debase: you need only smile at them, as you smile at the good face of your porter. The Diamants cease to be vulgar and tedious when they talk of their work, their courage, their struggle with life. I made them tell me their story: They were work-people in the country, and came to Paris with seven hundred francs savings, when the husband was twenty-two and the wife nineteen. They loved each other then, and love each other now. For ten years he worked at wages, and she kept a little shop; then, owing to his good conduct and industry, he became a partner in the establishment where he had been

a workman. Some simple, honest souls — *just persons* they call them — had confidence in them and aided them. In the world of small trade and private industry, there seems to be a loyalty, a devotedness, a spirit of association and fraternity, of which we have no idea: we are so engrossed by the art of doing without others, that we do not inquire if others have need of us. Where will you find young men of our class lending a helping hand in order that one of our comrades, known to be honest, but without means, may become a lawyer, an artist, or a physician? Among the people of whom I am speaking, personal merit represents capital. The faithful, intelligent and industrious workman finds hands stretched out to help him, and a certain feeling of justice interests in his behalf those tender and practical souls who regard mutual assistance as a good investment, and services rendered as an acquired glory. There is some self-love in this, and perhaps a little vanity. M. Diamant likes to tell of the good he has done, but likewise of the good that has been done to him, and the virtue of others is a theme on which he expatiates in a laughable and touching manner.

"One must know how to lose," he says, philosophically. "Young people don't calculate, and there are so many temptations for them in Paris! When you find any that are grateful for the consideration you manifest for them, though it may not enrich, it gratifies you."

And Mme. Diamant said, "Amen!" adding: "All we care for is to have enough to give our children an education. Our greatest disadvantage has been in our not having been taught anything. But they won't have to suffer from that, Dieu merci!" Simple folks, who think that when a man is educated he is saved.

I left them for the opera, where I still have my free

entrance. I wonder if it will be taken from me when it becomes known that I need it? Probably. As my clothes are still decent, I could circulate as usual. Mlle. Irène and her daughter Jeanne, the beautiful rossa, were in their box. I was curious to observe closely that heiress of so many men who have contributed to enrich her, while her real father is unknown, — I had previously had merely a glimpse of her — so I placed myself where I could examine her without attracting her attention. She is really beautiful; white and rosy as a dawn of spring. Nothing can be softer than her blue eyes, or more magnificent than her wealth of golden chestnut hair. Dressed entirely in white, without ornament of any kind, holding her bouquet of camellias carelessly on her lap, thoughtful or melancholy, candid, and perhaps timid, she seemed an embodiment of disturbed or alarmed modesty. Poor rich girl! Does she know that her wealth is a stigma? Does she know that between the hand of an honest man and her dowry there is a gulf which tears cannot fill? Woe to the man who loves her! This thought made me fly, and I do not wish ever to see her again.

I got back to my village at midnight, somewhat saddened, somewhat tired by my day. I am supposed to have returned to the south. M. Diamant keeps my secret faithfully. Here I call myself plain M. Pierre. Now I shall be quiet for a while.

The said village has only one street, but that is half a league long. It runs along a hill, opposite to that in front of me, about half-way up the slope. The railroad station is at the entrance of the village, and I am at the other end. Moreover, when I had walked the whole length of the long street, I had to go down by a dark path through the fields, to reach my door. The moon

had not risen, and I could not have seen even the shadow of a prowling dog, as I groped my way along. If mother Agatha, who pets me, had not waited for me, and I had not seen her light in the window, I really don't know how I could have found the house. While directing my steps by that polar star, I saw the other mysterious star shining from the opposite side of the valley. Do these two poor terrestrial stars look at, and see each other? Perhaps the he, or she, who is watching over there, does not know that any one is watching here. My village sleeps like one man. That in front does not show a single gleam of light. Only these two little cottages, forgotten sentinels in the silent night, are alive in the mute valley; but they have no more knowledge of each other than the inhabitants of Venus have of those of Saturn, and every man is a little world which revolves in its own little orbit, and does not reveal itself to the entirely distinct little worlds which pass near, and which it calls its fellows.

XI.

From Pierre to Philippe.

Vaubuisson, 8 March.

I FORGOT to tell you that I also saw at the opera the new Mme. Duport: that Rebecca, whom my uncle couldn't make me appreciate any better than Mlle. Jeanne. Isn't it strange, that the same day and the same hour should have brought before me the two principal causes of my ruin, those two brilliant heiresses, either of whom, as my uncle said, I could have married if I hadn't been a pedant, a donkey and a coward? Rebecca is considered handsome. Her type is decidedly Jewish — eyes black as night, hair growing low, lips red and full; but she has a wicked look. She is witty enough to smash things, they say, but her laugh is bitter. In fact she was *antipatica* to me at first sight, and I verily believe she would have cut off my head and put it in a bag. My uncle has never forgiven my unwillingness to share the fate of Holofernes. From that moment the continuance of our connection became almost impossible. It had become very difficult, after the failure of his first matrimonial project respecting me — for there were three. I mentioned a blonde to you, but I did not say much about her, for I saw her only a moment. I don't know if she would have threatened me with so tragical a fate as the brunette, but I do believe that an alliance with her would

have been almost as disgraceful as with the rossa. My remembrance of her is rather comical, and as I have nothing new to write about just now, I will take you with me on a little journey through the past.

It was a few days after your final departure for Auvergne, when I had just received my degree as Bachelor of Science, and had hardly fifteen hairs on my chin, that my uncle said to me one evening:

"Do you know that you are a man now, and that I am thinking of your establishment? You must be married, my boy, and I've got a wife for you."

I jumped up in astonishment: "I'm too young, uncle."

"Yes, you are rather young, but there are opportunities which do not occur twice in one's life, and I have such a one now. You know M. Aubry?"

"No, uncle."

"What? M. Celestin Aubry, who sold such beautiful diamonds to the Duke of B——? He was in the office yesterday."

"I didn't notice him."

"You were wrong; you should always notice a man who has three millions, and only two children. He adores them; he has a generous heart, and means to give each of them a million when they get married. But he wants to marry them. They are not handsome. The boy is slightly hump-backed, and the girl, though not badly made, is rather diminutive; but she's very young, — only sixteen, — well brought up, and accustomed to mind, — for papa Aubry doesn't trifle, and things go on at his house as if they were on board ship."

"Stop a moment, uncle; I recollect him now. M. Aubry is the man who has been all over the world, and followed all kinds of trades."

"Well, what of that? That's the way men of sense get rich. He found gold in the Brazilian mines, and diamonds in the rock. He has made an immense fortune, and goes on increasing it. He owns ships, and has negroes for servants. You ought to see the order and luxury in his house. Come, get your hat. We'll go and make him a visit."

"What? Immediately?"

"We must strike the iron while it's hot."

I had then formed no opinion in favor of or against marriage, having never thought about it, and believing that I had a good ten years before me to reflect in. I still retained some of the timid respect of childhood, which does not foresee the possibility of open revolt; and, besides, I was so much stupefied by my uncle's precipitancy, that I followed him mechanically to the Place Royale — I forget the number. It was summer, and the heat was excessive; but I felt chilled to my very bones, as we went up the gloomy staircase of one of those great old houses which are all exactly alike.

"Uncle!" I cried, tragically, as he was about to ring at the first floor, "have you asked this young lady in marriage for me?"

"No," replied my uncle, whose arm I had seized in my anguish; "her father has offered her to me for you. Let me ring."

"You must swear that this visit shall not bind me to anything."

"Nonsense! I don't want to marry you against your will."

"Is *she* very handsome?"

"No; but you will see her."

"But why does he want to give her to me, when I have no fortune?"

"In the first place, that's not so; you will have my fortune, if you let yourself be guided by me; and besides — I may as well tell you — M. Aubry is of a low family; he thinks a great deal of a name, and you know that you are noble by your mother's side."

"But I bear my father's name, and don't wish to change it."

"You need not change it; you will call yourself Sorède de Pontgrenet. There! That's enough! You annoy me."

Then he rang.

A big black man, whimsically attired in red, led us through two large halls, very high and very dark, filled up to the ceiling with a mass of indescribable things, from old Spanish paintings to Indian moccasins. It was still worse in the saloon. There the furniture and walls were loaded with crockery, birds' tails, reliquaries, arms, mirrors, musical instruments, stuffed birds, shells, skeletons, and trash from all parts of the world. Among it all there were some magnificent things and rare objects of great value; but in the display of all those wonders and all those trifles, one felt the trader, and not the artist, or enlightened amateur.

"Why! This is nothing but a bric-a-brac shop!" cried I. My uncle hushed me with an angry look, and M. Celestin Aubry made his appearance.

He was a great devil of the most vulgar type, though the tan of the tropics, the arrangement of his shirt, his whiskers and his hair, seemed intended to give him the appearance of a naval officer. The first three words he uttered revealed the low filibuster most clearly, in spite of his pretence to education and good manners. He showed us the principal articles of his collection, with explanations which were quite curious, but which smelt

of robbery or cheating a league off. Then he boasted of his millions, his negroes, his parrots, his children, and his furniture. He called his blacks, speaking to them as if they were dogs, to show us what fine specimens they were. He had bought them very dear; he knew well enough that they were free on French soil, but he kept them by fear and good food; besides, he knew how to train these people, and to prove it to us, he took hold of one by the ear, and pulled it till the blood came, making us remark that the wretched man continued to smile in order to show that it did not hurt him.

"I know very well," he added, confidentially, "that I do hurt him; but I have worked on his self-love from childhood, and taught him to bear everything. I do not abuse my power; I am not bloody" — he meant cruel — "but if I wanted to I could martyrize him, and he would be delighted. These are good, true negroes, you see. When you know how to choose and train them, they will never leave you."

"Sir," said I, indignant, "did you buy these blacks on the coast of Guinea?"

"You think, perhaps," he replied, "that I have been in the trade? Well, why not? I have done everything, as I told you; and there is nothing wrong in it when you buy of people who sell their children, their servants, and their wives. If you pay, they are well satisfied; and I always did pay. There were some shabby fellows who traded with the blacks, and killed the sellers while they carried off the merchandize. But that was in old times; in my time the trade was fair. However, I didn't get mouldy in it; it was no good; the English were too troublesome. Now I've left business; and when I get rid of what I have here, I shall retire to Saint Malo, and grow old in peace: that's my native place. I will buy an

old chateau, a great estate, and if my son-in-law likes the country, I will put him at the head of my farming."

"Your son-in-law?" said I. "What son-in-law?"

He took this simple protest for a proffer still more simple, smiled at me as at a child who holds out his hand for a sweetmeat, and replied in the most outrageously benign manner:

"My dear sir, my son-in-law will be the man who pleases my daughter."

"Ah! And if your big negro should please her?"

"Farceur! Blacks never please whites, and though my daughter is not a creole, she has the principles *she ought to have.* Born and brought up in France, she is a little too much French to be anything else. Her mother used to meddle with everything. You know that the Norman women want to manage the business as well as their husbands. That's all very well so long as the husband is away, but when he gets back the reign of the petticoats must come to an end: one master is enough in a household. Besides, my wife is dead, and my daughter has been properly trained. She doesn't contradict me in anything, and has accepted the part that rightly belongs to women: to say nothing, to do nothing, and to know nothing."

These words, uttered with an ignoble accent which I cannot convey to you, gave me, as you may suppose, such an opinion of my intended, that I was unable to think seriously of carrying out my uncle's project, and so resolved to amuse myself.

"Sir, since you feel so much confidence in me as to inform me of your views on family matters, I may be bold enough to ask you what will be the attitude of your future happy son-in-law towards yourself?"

"It will be very simple, my dear child," he replied,

falling into the trap, and delighted with me. "In order to learn how to command, he must first learn how to obey; and my son-in-law, who is to succeed to my absolute authority, must begin by studying my system and conforming to it."

"Ah! That is, he must learn to have his ears pulled out without making a wry face!"

"What a joker he is!" said M. Aubry to my uncle, with his patronizing smile. "Come! I like wit, and even a little sharpness. Now I'll go and see if the little one has finished her siesta, for I've got her into good habits. A woman ought to sleep from noon till four o'clock; otherwise she gets tired and troublesome. Wait for me a moment."

He opened a door close by us; but, just as he was going in, the black man came to tell him that the money had come for some article that had been sold the day before, and he went out without remembering to shut the door of the boudoir where his daughter was asleep. I stepped to the open door to look at her, and my uncle, completely stupefied by my apparent docility, did not think of objecting.

The boudoir, which was quite dark, and almost cold, was nothing but a store-room for hammocks. Some, of all kinds and colors, were piled up against the walls, and others carpeted the floor, while, in the midst of all, in a hammock suspended from hooks, lay a mass of white muslin, the form of which I could not distinguish; by its side, kneeling on the floor and holding in her listless hands the cord with which she had been swinging her mistress, an ugly negro girl was fast asleep also. I believe that both were snoring. I grew bold enough to take two steps forward into the room, that I might get a better view of Mlle. Aldine, or Smeraldine Aubry,

for I have never forgotten her name. When she was born, her father, who had just made a good trade in emeralds, thought fit to call her *Esmeralda.* This romantic name, translated and contracted into low Norman, became Aldine — so M. Aubry had told us a quarter of an hour before.

I was thus able to make a rapid but sufficient inspection of the little monster my uncle so kindly intended for me. Coiled up like a dog in the hammock, Mlle. Aldine appeared to be not more than three feet tall. I couldn't see much of her, except two scraggy childish arms loaded with bracelets up to the elbows, and a face as round and red as a big cider-apple. Certainly, what the poor girl could best do was to look as little like her father as possible; but, in taking exactly the opposite direction, nature had done still worse for her.

I did not stop to look at the negress, but turned quickly to my uncle, and, in a few decisive words, expressed to him my pity for the poor girl's physical ugliness, and my abhorrence of the moral ugliness of the ex-slave-trader. I was so energetic that my uncle began to fear some scene with M. Aubry, and hurried me away, saying to the black man that we would not disturb him while engaged in business, but would call again.

We did not call again, and I never again saw Mlle. Aubry. I believe that M. Celestin Aubry sold all his traps in a lump a few days afterwards, and went to Normandy with his children. I don't know if he bought his grand manor, but I remember that, some six or eight months later, my uncle, who, without saying much about it, had been quite cold to me since my rebellion, cried out, as if involuntarily, on reading a letter he had just received:

"There! Celestin Aubry has lost his son! Now he'll give his daughter a million and a half when she marries, and she'll have three at his death! Ah! It's a pretty heap of money, and if you weren't such a fool! —"

I thought it best not to answer, and some weeks passed before my uncle returned to the charge. There was time enough yet, he then said. I was invited to go to Saint Malo and hunt. I replied that I did not like to hunt heiresses. Thereupon my uncle got angry. I was right enough in thinking Aubry disagreeable and fanciful, he said; and he, himself, certainly did not approve of the slave-trade, but my tone was offensive, and I was getting altogether too free in my speech: I seemed to be lecturing him; I ought to remember that old relatives should not be treated in that way, especially when one had need of them. This kind of reprimand was frequently repeated on the slightest occasion, and I soon saw that I had wounded my uncle's self-love. My refusal to make advances to Rebecca Nuñez made the matter worse, and, when Jeanne the Red was brought forward, I said something that finished me. I reminded my uncle that he had not blamed me much for refusing as father-in-law a man who had traded in blacks, and that, consistently, he must excuse me for declining as mother-in-law a woman who had made such an extended traffic with whites. In reply to this judicious observation, my uncle wanted to kill me. So much for trying to be witty!

But this is quite another part of speech! My uncle, also, had traded in human flesh! Did you know it? I never knew anything about it, and I believe that, as he put nothing but his money into that kind of business, he may never have spoken of it to any one.

How do you suppose I found it out here, after living

with him twenty years, and never imagining anything of the kind? I brought with me some boxes, into which I had thrown my papers and letters when I left the house In overhauling them I found an open letter which I suppose must have been lost by my uncle, picked up by a servant, and put among mine, on my table; I don't know how else it could have got there. I looked it over without remarking the address, and was quite astonished at reading that there was a balance to my credit with the house of M. & Co. I was asking myself how this good luck could have befallen me, when I saw that the letter had reference to conscripts and substitutes, and that my uncle's profits from the partnership had been so large as to constitute a great portion of the fortune he intended to leave to me. Now I can understand how my scruples must have wounded him, and how often I must, unintentionally, have pained him personally. He must have thought that I knew something of the fact, and that my sarcasms and reflections upon wrongly-acquired fortunes were indirectly intended for him. Poor man! He must have suffered, and have thought me cruelly ungrateful! How can I let him know that I was entirely innocent, without at the same time referring to that painful past which he, perhaps, wishes to forget? A just reprobation stigmatizes any business which speculates in the lives of men and the sorrows of families. The source of my uncle's fortune is, therefore, in some degree, subject to the same odium as M. Aubry's and Mlle Irène's; but certainly it is not for me to condemn him, and he will be sufficiently punished on knowing how absolute and serious are the reasons which now compel me to refuse his gifts.

So you see there can be no drawing back, my dear Philippe, no compromising with the past. I have burned

all my ships, and must build for myself some small bark, the flag of which shall be at least free from stain. I know that you will never again say to me: "I am anxious about the step you are taking." You will say: "Do not look behind, but go ahead."

XII.

From Philippe to Pierre.

Volvic, 10 March.

YES, my dear boy, I did know it, and thought that you knew it too; therefore I never mentioned it. Your uncle gained some hundreds of thousands of francs by becoming bondsman for a dealer in men. He did it without scruple, because he does not reflect, and is therefore liable unwittingly to commit a social crime, while intrenching himself behind his individual uprightness. He has been educated in the religion of self, and, provided he does honor to his signature and his word, he cares little whether his money goes to injure or to help humanity. This was why I was sorry when you deserted the wholesome ways of spiritual philosophy, which we were so pleasantly following together, to enter upon those of materialism, which is so closely allied nowadays, in many young minds, with absolute individualism. I was rather afraid, I confess, lest, even while protesting against the gross application which M. Piermont openly makes of the principle of *each for himself*, you might allow yourself to become accustomed to look upon general evils with indifference. Assuredly, I am happy at finding my fears groundless, and, if my anxiety be not wholly dissipated, it is because I would like to see in you, in every respect, that intellectual antithesis which your protest

ought to represent. You need to be this complete contrast to your uncle, in order not only to preserve your self-respect, but to produce something young and living. What can proceed from the negation of collective life? An apology for self? This does not interest others, and yet you must invite the public to become interested in your thought.

I do not continue this subject, because it is agreed that we are not to discuss the matter in advance; but you will remember what that big round-faced Anselm Fouval said, when we were trying to make him comprehend certain elementary truths. "Oh, for my part," he said, "*I don't cut.*" In his student's slang, that meant: "I don't care for anything or anybody." Afterwards, when we were out gunning, and dining in a hut, he almost got burned alive, while swearing that we were chaffing him, and that he wouldn't *cut.* If we will not share our bread with others, we run the risk of being left alone some day, when there is neither bread nor knife in the house.

As to your uncle, stick to your resolution, and forgive him, too. He is fleshy and red in the face, and he eats a good deal; do not take his property, but do not let him die without knowing that you have not forgotten what he has done for you. However, you have already thought of this, I am sure. As for you, who are thin and pale, you must not stay in the house too much, and I hope that you will tell me about your walks. Permit the friend not to forget the physician.

XIII.

From Pierre to Philippe.

Vaubuisson, 13 March.

YES, I had thought of it: I have written to my uncle, and he has no reason to be anxious about me.

I take two hours' walk every day, and manage to get over a good deal of ground in a short time. The weather is quite mild, and there is something like a thrill of expectation in the air. Vegetation is still very backward, but we have delicious bursts of sunshine, and the meadows are doing their best to throw off their white, icy coat.

I have been to look at the mysterious cottage which puzzles me with its persistent wakefulness; it is a very mean, very ugly building, on a narrow road, which runs along the base of the hill, and connects the two villages; it stands quite alone at the edge of the wood, and has two stories, with one window on the north, and two on the south, in each; it is a very poor, and probably inconvenient dwelling. The staircase is outside, of stone, and uncovered; a little vegetable garden, surrounded by a rustic fence, and a spring a few steps off on the road, are the only accessories. The view must be pretty from the upper windows, which were closed by very white little curtains. My window is in plain sight. The basement

seemed to be a kitchen; some fowls were pecking about the foot of the staircase, the steps of which, and the little landing-place, seemed to have been freshly swept; but I did not see the shadow of a single inhabitant, and, though I walked slowly, did not hear any human sound issue from the poor but neat abode. The poverty that dwells there must be self-respecting, and I had no right to speculate about it. A peasant, who was trimming trees near by, could have given me information, I suppose; but I avoid questioning, in order not to be questioned in my turn. And yet I could not help addressing a very impertinent question to my old gentleman, the fisherman, whom I met as I was passing through the hamlet of Grez. The indigence I had just been contemplating, had turned my thoughts to the subject of my work; and, on seeing the old man's happy face, the idea came to me that it might be his home I had been looking at a quarter of an hour before. As I saw from a distance that he was preparing to salute me with increased benevolence, I determined to speak to him; but only imagine my stupidity: instead of opening the conversation with some polite phrase, I could say nothing but what filled my thoughts; and, consequently, addressed him in this crazy way:

"Can you tell me, monsieur, what happiness is?"

I had no sooner uttered the words, than I would gladly have swallowed them again; but the good man appeared neither surprised nor shocked, and replied in a sweet voice, with the most refined pronunciation:

"Happiness, monsieur, is to have your age, your legs, and your face."

"I am of opinion," I retorted, "that it is to have your goodness and your affability."

The acquaintance was made. Three minutes later, we were talking together like old friends; for, instead of

going home — he lives at Grez, and not opposite to me — he preferred to walk with me as far as the stream. He was not sorry, he said, to take a look at the fish.

"I hope," said I, "that you will excuse my persistency. — Happiness is the satisfaction of our tastes; therefore you are happy when you fish."

"Yes, when I have good luck. But you have not got it yet. As our tastes can be satisfied but seldom, and then only in an incomplete or disturbed manner, it is not there that we must place our happiness."

"Must? Is it a question about what must be or what is? Is happiness a product of our will, or of the nature which has placed it within our reach? If it be an intellectual creation, how is it that every one cannot attain it? If it be a good which nature offers, how is it that we do not know it?"

"You are asking a great deal in a single breath," he replied, "and you would probably catch almost any one else at fault; for men, in general, do not know much about the manner of being happy; but I have reflected on the subject, and will give you my opinion. Permit me to look under these branches; I have a ground-line here."

He drew up his line, and with it, a small eel, which he silently put into his basket, testifying neither pleasure or disappointment. "It's but a poor catch," said I.

"Not so! Considering my appetite, it will make me a very good dish: it will last me two days, and I need not fish to-morrow. Ah, ha!" he added, laughing; "you had applied your theory to me, had you not? Well! you are mistaken. I do not dislike fishing, it is true: it is an amusement like any other; but I much prefer reading or dreaming, and when I make war on these innocent animals, it is solely to supply my need of food."

"Are you really in that condition, monsieur?"

"I am in that condition, and am content to be in that condition. Therein is my happiness; but, as I cannot and do not wish to enter into any explanation respecting myself, we will talk about you, if you please."

"But I am in the same position exactly; I ought not —"

"Well then, we will talk about happiness in general, and from a philosophical point of view. But it is getting dark. Will you come and see me to-morrow? I will wait for you at the entrance of the village, for you could not find my nest."

I promised, and intend to be there, for the good man has won my heart. I do not know if he be uncommonly intelligent, or somewhat crazy. His beautiful black eye says both, alternately. No matter, we shall see. But all this does not tell me why somebody watches every night at the house in front. Perhaps nobody does: some timid people keep a lamp burning all night, as a guard against robbers. To be sure, a sou's worth of oil every night would be a good deal for a poor man, but the feeling of security in sleep is well worth it.

Why should you confound positive philosophy with the theory of selfishness, or make the one a consequence of the other? The new school, to which I belong, insists upon morality with the more earnestness, because it fights against the interested, and, therefore, entirely selfish virtue of those who expect to be compensated in another life.

XIV.

From Pierre to Philippe.

Vaubuisson, 25 March.

SPRING announces her coming by sounding her flourishes in the green wheat and the rosy skies. I cannot restrain myself: I walk, I run, and I talk a part of the day, and find myself no worse for working in the evening.

I have made a discovery: my neighbor opposite is a woman, and a young and well-made one too. I have not seen her face; it was concealed by a knit hood, such as is worn by the women of the village here and by the workwomen in Paris; but instead of being pinned above the forehead, and edged with woollen pompons or a ruche of ribbons, this head-dress was loose, covered the hair, and terminated in a thick black knit veil which fell as low as the mouth. The precaution of veiling was adopted on my approach, for she was filling a pitcher at the spring. The hood had fallen back, and I saw a magnificent head of hair, tied in great masses, on a neck of aristocratic whiteness; but at the sound of my footsteps the hood was drawn up and the head turned away, as if by chance, but I believe intentionally, while I passed, and I could see only the lithe figure — a beautiful form in a loose dress, which was not a servant's, nor yet a lady's. She is some fanciful workwoman. She must be ugly, since she hides her face so carefully; worse than

ugly, perhaps; probably disfigured. No matter, she has *charmed my heart* by her manner. I have never seen anything so sweet, so modest, and so graceful as the action of her arm in carrying the pitcher, and of her little feet as she went up the path to her house. She was without shoes, poor girl: she wore black woollen slippers, quite neat, but a world too large, and she almost lost one of them at the foot of the steps. I saw the quick and modest movement, the skill with which she recovered the ungrateful slipper without stooping, and I saw, also, the delicately white arm and the pretty foot.

She must be refined, perhaps charming, but crushed by poverty and accidental ugliness. She need not blush, she need not hide her face: I will not be indiscreetly curious, or disdainful; I will salute her without looking at her. But can she be living all alone in that lonely house? I might ascertain; but why should I, since the mystery puzzles and amuses me?

Still more interesting, and quite as mysterious, is M. Sylvestre, for that is the name of my fisherman, or rather, that is what he calls himself. As I was going towards Grez to be punctual at the rendezvous he had appointed, I met one of the Vaubuisson mechanics whose acquaintance I had made at the inn, and he asked if I was going to visit the *hermit*. I was not much surprised at the question, as mother Agatha had already spoken of a hermit as the principal curiosity of the district; but I was afraid of keeping M. Sylvestre waiting, and so did not stop to ask the man what he meant; especially as I knew that I could ascertain the fact from M. Sylvestre himself.

The hamlet of Grez is situated just at the angle where my narrow valley branches off from another broader one, which is richer and more smiling, but less rural and retired. I met M. Sylvestre at the entrance of the village,

and, turning our backs on the valley, we entered the wood on the hill by a very steep path. The good man walks like a Basque, and need not envy me my legs. Practice has given him a better wind, also, for he reached the gate of his manor without ceasing to talk. That manor consists of a little old pavilion in the Louis XIV. style, flanked on two sides by a ruined wall, covered with ivy. This wall encloses nothing, and only marks the entrance to an open glade of irregular dimensions. Some ruins covered with vegetation, and the pavilion, are all that remains of an ancient Carthusian Retreat. The whole place is charming in its abandonment and solitude, while the glade, which is closed in and sheltered on all sides, has a very mysterious aspect. The dilapidated pavilion looks rather threatening, but M. Sylvestre is persuaded that it will last longer than he. He hired it for almost nothing, and for the past two years the owner has refused to receive any rent, saying that he could not guarantee its safety, that he did not wish to repair it, and that M. Sylvestre could live there free of rent, at his own risk and peril, if he chose.

"I have always been lucky," he added ingenously, on relating the fact. "I am rather pinched, rather lazy, rather old, and here I have a charming dwelling in a picturesque spot, well hidden — just what I like — for nothing. Only look at that beautiful ivy which is beginning to cover my wall, and which insures its duration; for, as you know, ivy is the best friend of old walls: it eats a little into the surface, to be sure, but it binds the courses together, and, thanks to it, I am safe here for twenty years more. Suppose I be seventy-three already! I am not afraid of living on. My health is good, and whatever God wills, I will."

"You are an optimist, mon cher monsieur — perhaps that is wise."

"Perhaps it is a virtue, also, when one has known life. Come, sit you down. I can offer you a glass of cider; I have a barrel which was a present, and, if you are cold, I have fuel too; the owner lets me gather the dead branches in the wood. I don't need much; I am not of a chilly temperament, and seldom light a fire except for cooking. Will you taste my dinner? the eel I caught yesterday."

I tasted, from curiosity: it was boiled, without butter, almost without salt, with a few wild herbs, and was simply detestable. The cider rasped my throat like a file.

The pavilion was of two stories, the kitchen being below, the bed-room above; in the latter were a bureau, a toilet-table, a large table for writing, a small dinner-table, and an uncurtained bed; the whole of iron or plain wood, and of primitive simplicity. In the bureau were a change of clothes, three sheets and six shirts; in fine, just what was necessary for cleanliness. Everything was as neat as possible, swept and cleaned into the smallest corner; and this old man has no servant, he lives all alone, he does everything for himself, he washes and he mends! He has a dog, two hens, and three pigeons, for all society.

"Time never hangs heavy on my hands, monsieur," he said to me. "I have always something to do, as must be the case with every man who has to be sufficient unto himself. In the morning, I clean, I wash, I sweep, and hunt rats and mice with my dog. We must not have such creatures about us, because if we allow them the least foothold, they take advantage and increase enormously. Every one in his own place, eh! During

the day I fish, I gather herbs, or I snare small birds. Everybody must live! I do not like to kill, but I have the defect of being rather dainty, and so has my dog. There is a little good soil in the angle of the wall, where I raise some vegetables. In summer, I pick strawberries in the wood — they are excellent. In the autumn I find other wild fruits, which are also very good. My little garden could furnish a clove of garlic to season my cookery, but I abstain, because it spoils the breath, and consequently injures the sense of smell. A man should never deprive himself of the higher delights, and of the ability to enjoy the perfume of the mosses and broom-plants, which is worth much more than the momentary gratification of the palate. For the same reason, I do not drink wine. Wine diminishes the delicacy of our taste, and prevents us from appreciating the different flavors of spring water. I assure you that, in my walks, when hunting or fishing, I have a delicious treat whenever I find a thicket laden with fine wild mulberries by the side of a bed of water-cresses. I then say to myself that, in nature, the cloth is always laid for the man who has not falsified his instincts or acquired superfluous wants. You may imagine," he added, "that, when I have laid in provision for one, two, or three days, I come home with a famous appetite. I dine with Farfadet, and I talk to him. You must always talk to dogs if you want them to be intelligent. After that I wash and put away my dishes. The days when I do not go out, I wash and mend my clothes, and repair my furniture. I find materials among the ruins of the convent, and I have some tools. I like to try all trades, and to simplify the articles I use. My work is rough, but it is interesting, and sometimes I get passionately engrossed by it. In the evening, I read or write, which

amuses me also. Finally, I sleep well, which amuses me still more, for I dream a great deal, and my dreams are generally pleasant. You see clearly that time cannot drag with me."

"And yet such complete solitude! Do you mean to say that you are never sad, never gloomy, even without reason, without cause?"

"Oh yes, I sometimes am, like all the rest of the world; but I have a remedy close at hand, and I turn to it. There is Grez, right at my feet. If I feel oppressed at night, I open my window, look at the roofs, listen to the silence, and say, 'Good! the people there are sleeping well.' That is enough. If I feel out of sorts in the daytime, I run down the path, enter the first house I come to, and talk. All these peasants are men, like you and me; they have their good and their bad qualities — their wise and their foolish notions. Some are very worthy, others witty. We all live the same life, and everything that interests them interests me also, more or less, except the love of property, which torments them, and does not torment me; but I sha'n't quarrel with them on that score; they have duties and rights which no longer attach to me. Such is my life. Wishing to close it according to my liking, in spite of my poverty, I have assumed the profession of anchorite, for it is I whom they call *The Hermit*; but, as I love my kind, I have not been so foolish as to bury myself in the depths of a forest, or to perch myself on the top of a high mountain. The desert is everywhere when one is old and poor, and can be found within an hour of Paris, as you see."

"Your arrangements seem to me to be wonderfully good for your purpose," I replied, "and all you have said confirms me in the opinion that you consider happiness to

consist in the gratification of your tastes. But why did you tell me just the contrary yesterday?"

"I told you the truth yesterday. It is quite rational and quite allowable to seek the gratification of our tastes, and this may contribute to happiness; but happiness is something far beyond that."

"Could you define that something? You would render me an immense service."

"My dear child, it can be defined to one's self when one believes in it, but hardly to one who does not believe in it. What is your own opinion?"

"I believe that it is for man an aspiration never satisfied — a permanent ideal with a fleeting and relative reality."

"You are quite right. It is so, in these times. We cannot look for anything more in the present state of our society, of our customs and our light; but you are wrong if you think that your definition represents anything more than a transitive and relative truth."

"Go on, monsieur. I listen to you with great attention, I assure you."

"I could give you many definitions no more complete than your own: tell you, for instance, that happiness consists in the free development of all our faculties, or in the practice of virtue — in self-sacrifice or in the fulfilment of duty. Well! all these are elements of happiness, and an eminent writer was correct as well as witty when he recently said that, in such case, happiness was a mosaic."

"I see that, in your retreat, you keep yourself informed as to current ideas and literature."

"Yes; I go to Paris once a month, by railroad, third-class, for seven sous, and spend the day in a reading-room. I should be happier if I could live alone with my own ideas; they are cheerful, while the ideas of the time are sad, and the literature itself is not joyous; but I

must do as I have said, in order that my reason may continue to control my rather enthusiastic reveries. Dieu merci! I find them always fresh and young, when my reason has taken a step in advance — that is, made a concession to the reason of others; which is a proof that reason is not an evil. But I see that you are impatient for my definition. Here it is: Happiness is everything that is said of it by all the different schools of philosophy; it belongs to this world and to other worlds; to this life and to other lives; it is within us and without us; it is in the progress of the individual and in that of society; it is absolute and it is relative; we make it, and we find it ready-made: in one word, it is a condition of life, like suffering — as fugitive, as relative, as real, as certain, as varied. We are ungrateful when we say that there is less of it, because it tends to increase and become perfect on the earth, while suffering and death tend always to diminish and disappear."

"What! Even death! Oh! M. Sylvestre, what an optimist you are!"

"I know what I am saying, and it is not so absurd as you imagine. But let us stop here for to-day. Reflect on my definition. You can make the deductions better than I. You will not confute it, I assure you; it is the truth."

You will agree with me that this is an extraordinary personage, armed with an invincible conviction, which is certainly not common in one who would be considered unhappy; for this man, measured by the material standard, is in the lowest grade as regards well-being.

I was afraid of being troublesome, and proposed to leave him; he retained me.

"You will give me much pleasure by staying a little longer, if you will permit me to occupy myself," he said,

"for I am not accustomed to sit with idle hands. Ah! The buttons of this gaiter seem to be coming off. Please talk to me while I sew them on; tell me anything you like, as I do when I talk to my dog. You will be doing a kind thing, for it is seldom that I hear anything to stimulate my brain, and I often have to talk aloud to myself, in order not to fall asleep in absolute personal quiescence."

"Then," said I, "as you do not wish me to talk about my theories, let me talk about yourself. So you are a spiritualist and a materialist at one and the same time?"

"Parbleu! Please thread my needle for me. I really believe that my sight is beginning to fail, and that I shall have to buy a pair of glasses before many years. Ah! You think that, because I am a spiritualist, I must deny and despise matter? Why should you think me only half a man? I do not pretend to be a complete man; there are very few such, if any; but I try not to slice or divide myself. The ascetics are crazy. You see that by simplifying my life as much as possible in conformity with my means — for I have three hundred francs a year, monsieur, and no more — I have secured the delights of life. There are some things with which I might dispense, but a man ought not to dispense with anything, unless compelled to; and to restrict one's tastes and wants from motives of avarice, self-mortification, or contempt of what is pleasant and good, is a wrong — is ingratitude towards life. For life is good, mon cher monsieur, even in this little phase through which we are now passing, in which we are conscious neither of the beginning nor the end. It is a feast, to which a liberal, though unknown, host invites us. It is composed of the ideal and the real: of things which we see, which we touch,

which we eat, which we breathe, and which we possess; and also of things which we foresee, which we imagine, which we hope for, and which we expect. All this makes us very rich, and I am not so stupid as to despise one half in order to try to prove to myself that it is of less value than the other half. I want to nourish and to elevate myself with everything; and all the great minds who have contradicted each other, and quarrelled about the soul and the body ever since the world has been a world, furnish me with varied food, equally wholesome and strengthening. I think every one of them right, on the ground which each occupies; but they are all wrong together, in fighting against each other; for, in order to fight, one must restrict and circumscribe one's self. Literature, which is a grand thing in the process of formation, does not yet comprehend the immense work it has to do. Until now it has been busied in drawing distinctions; it is time to learn to combine them. It dissects, and notes differences; it ought to begin to connect, and to note relations. Thus the breaks in the continuity of the human mind will be made to disappear. Patience! The time will come! There will be but one philosophy of the future, and all the great workers will find place in it. Tenez! The other day, a Savoyard passed through the village with a long angular box in compartments, with glasses magnifying the pictures pasted up inside. I looked in and saw London, my next neighbor saw Venice, and a third the port of Marseilles. There were seven pictures in all. No one of us saw the same city, but each formed some idea of what a city is; and any one who looked at them all, one after the other, got the most complete idea of the conditions requisite for the establishment and maintenance of a capital. So the city of the human mind will be built with all the contributions

of the human mind. Come, let us lay happiness aside; it cannot be demonstrated otherwise than as wisdom can be demonstrated. Think a moment of the wisdom you would prefer to have. Would you not include strength and gentleness, susceptibility and reason, justice and mercy, patience and zeal, disinterestedness and a noble ambition, ardor and resignation: that is, all the opposites? You would quickly see that perfection could only be found in the union of all the elements of the opposing philosophies, which would nevertheless agree very well in your all-embracing aspiration, and no one of which would be superfluous in your integral whole. Thus you cannot conceive an ideal which shall not be the realization of the ideals of all those who have preceded you, without exception; and, if you cannot think of wisdom except under a form already embodied by humanity, wisdom is not therefore a vain word, and the possession of this treasure is not merely a dream. It is the same with happiness. We conceive it, therefore it exists; and though we may have neglected it, secured it, or lost it, it is still a fact, at once ideal and material, which we can neither deny nor destroy."

I try in vain to repeat all he said, but he displayed so much earnestness, so much conviction and sincerity, that I could have listened to him all day and all night. Suddenly he stopped talking, and seemed to continue his demonstration inwardly. I supposed that he might have his hours or his caprices of meditation, and left, inviting him to come and see me in his turn, which he promised cordially.

As I was passing through Grez, on my way home, I fell in with a group of villagers, who were talking at the door of a wine-shop. Here everybody salutes everybody, and I hastened to be beforehand with those genial people.

"So you have been to visit the hermit, monsieur?" said one. "Well! how did you like him?"

"Very much, monsieur; he is very agreeable. Don't you think so?"

The man who questioned me, and whom I questioned in my turn, was a fat, jovial personage — the miller — whose acquaintance I had made at his mill, near by.

"Oh! I like him very much. He is a nice man, and not much of a bigot for a monk."

"What's that you're talking about, Trixier?" cried a woman with a mustache and an intelligent eye; "M. Sylvestre is no more a monk than you are."

"I know that," replied the miller, "but a hermit is always something like a priest."

"This one is a hermit because he likes to be one," replied the matron; "he never goes to church, so far as I know. He says that he *worships God in the temple of nature*, or something like that."

"That proves he's crazy," said another.

"Oh! you're pious, and you don't like him."

"I should like him well enough if he were as poor as he pretends to be; but he's an old humbug, who, they say, has more than — Well! I don't know how much; but they do say that he could buy all the province, and the whole world besides, if he wanted to."

"No more than that!" retorted the matron, shrugging her shoulders. "Look here, Jean! you've no more brains than your shoe. I tell you that M. Sylvestre hasn't twenty sous a day to spend, and if he were to fall sick I should go and nurse him, for he would die miserably if left alone. Isn't it true, monsieur," said she, turning to me, "that he is a sensible man, whom we ought to respect?"

"That is certainly my opinion, madame; has he lived in this neighborhood long?"

"Ten years, monsieur, and nobody knows where he came from. That's what makes them talk so. Some pretend that he has been guilty of some crime; others that he used to be a general or a prefect. Ah! I can't tell you all the things they say; but the mayor of Vaubuisson knows all about him, and has ordered the police not to trouble him. He vouches for him as if he were his father; only he says that he might live in a different way if he chose — that he has rich relations, and that he is insane with pride. Where's the harm in that, if he doesn't injure anybody? For my part, I would be cut in pieces for him, and I'm not the only one; isn't that true, you men?"

There was a general assent; and I was glad to hear it, for I, too, would willingly be a little cut in pieces for that sympathetic old man, who believes in happiness, and, though he does not boast of having attained it, finds means to be grateful for all things, either to chance or to Providence.

turb her peace, or even make people talk about her, would be God's enemy."

"I do not know how considerate a man I may be, M. Sylvestre, but I believe myself an honorable one. Be easy, therefore, and tell me why you esteem her so highly, in order that my respect may have a solid foundation."

"Mlle. Vallier came here about two years ago; she told me her history, and, as there is no secret about it, I can repeat it to you: Her parents had been very rich, but in consequence of some speculations which — from what she, without knowing much about the matter, told me — I believe to have been of a doubtful character, her father was ruined, and died of grief. Being an only child, she met all his obligations, and, at eighteen, was left with twelve hundred francs income, which is but little for a young person accustomed to opulence. She was not discouraged, however, but came to Paris, and had begun to give lessons in music, when an excellent girl, a foreigner, who had been brought up with her, to whom she was attached, and who, like herself, had no family and no resources, fell dangerously ill. What do you suppose Mlle. Vallier did? She at once gave up teaching, in order to find some country-place where her companion could breathe pure and wholesome air. By chance, she heard some one praise the soft, warm climate of our valley. It is not every one who has the means of going to Nice or Cannes. Happily there are a great many little nooks which enable one to avoid the expense of a long journey. Mlle. Vallier therefore hired the cottage you have seen, intending to spend a few weeks there; but her young patient proved to be nearly dead with an aneurism of the heart, and, when this was ascertained to be the fact, Mlle. Vallier was told that the only method of prolonging the poor child's life was to keep her in the pass-

ably comfortable situation in which she then was, and to guard her from every kind of fatigue and anxiety. Since then they have been fixed here. The sick girl is slowly wasting away; the mistress has become the servant, and does all the work of the little household. You saw her carrying water; another day you might see her carrying wood, or washing her patient's clothes. She works all day, and watches at night, when the other does not sleep; and this happens so often, that I do not see why the one who is dying has not, before now, killed the one who is living. When she began this hard task, her complexion was like a splendid rose; now the rose has paled, and her eyes are twice as large as before; they are more beautiful, I admit, but they make me anxious. The sacrifice of one's self is beautiful and good, but when it exceeds the strength, we cannot help blaming our social arrangements."

I avoided a discussion about socialism, which is my old friend's great hobby; I was thinking only of Mlle. Vallier.

"Do you believe," I asked, "that this individual sacrifice is necessary? If Mlle. Vallier were earning two or three thousand francs a year at Paris, she could easily pay a nurse to take the whole care of the invalid. The appropriation of a third or the half of her income to this purpose, would still be a fine thing."

"Ah! Bah! A mercenary nurse!"

"Do you not think that, owing to the goodness of certain natures among the women of the people, paid devotedness may become real devotedness?"

"Certainly; I believe it and I know it; but, in order to trust to it, you must have had an opportunity to prove it. Besides, sick people are spoiled children; and this little one, who adores her mistress, would possibly die on the very day she left her."

"What good do the Montyon prizes do then, in case Mlle. Vallier sinks under her self-imposed task?"

"The Montyon prizes are not to be had without favor, my dear child, and favor rarely seeks those who hide themselves. Ah! If men only knew how many unknown heroisms require help, the complete insufficiency of such trifling aids would appear ridiculous."

I could not prevent M. Sylvestre from recurring to his dissatisfaction with society. There he ceases to be an optimist, and I was compelled to object to his reasoning. You know of old, that I cannot comprehend why the race should be blamed for what is the result of the imperfection of individuals. It seems to me that, in order to realize the dream of a universal brotherhood, we must begin by indoctrinating everybody with the idea of brotherhood. That is a very stupid way, I know; but I think it still more stupid that anybody should try any other, and I even told M. Sylvestre that the wish to impose ideal laws upon a positive people appeared to me not only wild, but wicked. That is the doctrine of terrorism: *Fraternity or Death;* and of the Inquisition also: *No Salvation outside the Church.* Virtue and faith, when enforced, are no longer virtue and faith; they become hateful. We must therefore give individuals time to comprehend the advantages of association, and the right to establish it themselves when the time comes. This is not the object of the propagandists, who personally want to gather the fruit — glory, power, influence, or some other advantage — from their arrogant doctrines, even if it be nothing more than the satisfaction of playing the part of sanctified apostles in a debased society. M. Sylvestre's reply did not change my opinion, but I could not help being struck by the justness of some of his views.

"You are right," he said, "in despising the arrogant and distrusting the ambitious, but you must not classify as such all who impatiently yearn for the kingdom of truth. Here am I, for instance, who live alone from necessity and taste, and would resist the promiscuousness of a compulsory association, and yet I can see no real progress for the human race except in the idea of association. I have no systems to present; I sometimes amuse myself by making them, but they will never see the light. The panaceas in which nobody believes are injurious, because they are ridiculous. Moreover, no one can foresee the form which association will assume when decreed by unanimous consent; even if the day were near, still to-morrow is always in the region of the unknown. Therefore I am not in favor of cities built in the clouds, but I do say, in general terms, that all our evils have a remedy, because they spring from scepticism and apathy; and since France appears to prefer dictators, I do not see why an advanced minority should not be represented by a group of men, or a single man if you prefer, who would have its support in pushing forward the always impeded car of progress. Initiation is not persecution; and, with your exaggerated respect for individual freedom, the protest of a few imbeciles would suffice to prevent the motion of the universe. I do not speak of the present," he added; "that would give rise to a political discussion, which leads to nothing, as it relates to the present moment only; but I tell you that we all ought to be socialists, as I understand the word: that is, resolved to suffer individually rather than decree the indefinite continuance of the suffering of others. On the day when each of us shall have a heart large enough to say: 'I am willing to be

unhappy in the stead of all,' all will be happy, without exception. Do not say that I am demanding an impossibility. What I demand is in the interest of the individual as well as in the interest of society. Those interests are identical: there is an absolute solidarity between them. You believe that the triumph of reason will infallibly bring to light the fact of that solidarity. I am as sure of it as you are; but reason is difficult and long of acquisition, without the impulse of feeling. The heart is a civilizer of much higher degree than the brain; it is Apollo, the destroyer of monsters, who mounts the chariot of fire. Reflect that we date from '89, a night of enthusiastic delirium. In one night, in one hour, feeling accomplished more than would have been possible in a century, by unaided reason. I have a high respect for your wisdom, my dear child, but must say that I look upon you as rather aged in comparison with myself, and am astonished to find that I have to encourage you, while you ought to be rejuvenating and reproving me."

There is truth in what the hermit says: "We are too old for our years"; but whose is the fault? Certainly that of the age in which we live. It is not of Cæsar, but of Doubt, that we can say: *Haec otia fecit.* We have a difficult task to fulfil; our infancy has been rocked in too many systems, and stupefied by too much controversy. We have been overwhelmed by the sophisms and truths cast together into the confused jumble of '48; and, as we were too much perplexed thereby, and are still too young to make the required separation, we wait, and we distrust everything that is not ourselves. M. Sylvestre confesses that this is so; and that, if we suffer in consequence of having so severe a task imposed upon us in

what should be the age of illusions, it is the fault of those who have preceded us.

None the less, however, does this incorrigible enthusiast blame my coldness and hesitation. His charming gayety renders our discussions very delightful; and the other day he informed me that, as he was the less mature of the two, he would call me his *papa*, and I should call him my *infant.*

All this enlivens my solitude; and though I do not abuse the neighborhood, I am really no longer alone, since I have near me a person so much alive, so remarkable, so expansive with regard to his opinions and ideas, and so mysterious, so hermetically sealed as to the facts of his past life. This is why I said at the beginning that reality is sometimes more romantic than fiction. Here are we three hermits within the compass of a league: M. Sylvestre, Mlle. Vallier and I; all three of us impoverished; for I can see that the old man has lived in opulence, and, sometimes, in relating anecdotes, words escape him like *my carriage*, *my people*, *my house.* We have all embraced poverty voluntarily, for it appears that Mlle. Vallier might have saved more of her inheritance had she been less scrupulous; and even now, but for her absolute personal devotedness, she might employ her courage, her talents, and her energy, to advantage; as to M. Sylvestre, I think it true that he could be better off if he chose, and that he is "insane with pride;" — a grand insanity, which establishes a bond of romantic fraternity between us three, whether Mlle. Vallier acknowledge it or not. We do not know each other, socially speaking; we do not even know each other's names; for Mlle. Vallier, if she share in any degree the pride of reduced rich persons, who desire to withdraw

themselves from the obtrusive pity of their former equals, may also have taken another name. Thus we are three shady personages, of whom destiny has made three disciples of modest Indigence, the goddess of the retiring poor. Perhaps this same destiny may make of us three friends.

XVI.

From Pierre to Philippe.

Vaubuisson, 15 April.

YOUR interpretation of my words — *fascinated by my neighbor* — is wrong. I can repeat it, and say that I am completely so, without thereby compromising her serenity, my repose, or your confidence. I am no more in love with her than my window is in love with hers; and my sighs will never cross the fields and trees which separate us, to disturb the calmness of her praiseworthy vigils. Love, as you understand it — and I am sure that it is the only love befitting that estimable and dignified person — is not the province of your friend Pierre. In the first place, it is not allowable: it would be necessary to have a fortune, a certain comfortable standing, or, at least, an assured means of support, to offer to a companion who has already gone through so many trials. In the second, it would be necessary to have a *young man's heart*, and that heart does not beat in this bosom. Take it as you will, I belong to my time, and that is not the time of *grand passions*. I may have imagined such, but those about me had them not. They married to make a beginning—or an end—of a secure and comfortable existence, and theirs were never grand passions. I never was able to construct either a drama or a novel from my fancies, and I have never been in love.

Is the poverty of my soul or the barrenness of my imagination the cause of this? Nobody ever confesses that this is the case, it is so humiliating. I would willingly confess, if I knew it to be so; but the fact is that I do not know. What I do know is, that the kind of love I have encountered has not taught me tenderness, and has inclined me to easy forgetfulness. Perhaps, also, my first legitimate curiosity, my first dream of family ties, was dissipated by the aspect of that horrid little Mlle. Aubry and her ignoble father; but, whether it be my own fault or not, I have never been in love, and I believe that now I cannot be. The worship of positive ideas has turned me from the worship of Astarte. All kinds of idolatry have become suspicious to me, and romantic literature has spoiled the women. They look for *Rénés* and *Anthonys* in their lovers, and for *Othellos* in their husbands; and, as they do not find them, they are disappointed, and have become as positive as we are. So much the worse for them! It would be much better if they had a just appreciation of serious conjugal friendship. We have both fallen from one excess into another, and love has flown away. Bon voyage!

So, then, honestly and seriously, I am fascinated by Mlle. Vallier, and my prediction that the three hermits of the valley of Vaubuisson would become three friends, has been fulfilled. This was how it came about:

I was passing by the mill of Grez — a small rustic building just below the village — when the miller, a good fellow, who wants to be friendly in order to find out my name, called to me. He complained that I had not been to see the working of his new bolting machine, and asked me to go and look at his cows. All the small proprietors here have cows of the Swiss or the Breton breed, very handsome, of a warm color, striped with black or flecked

with white, with small horns, deep dewlaps, and fine legs. The open stable greeted us with a pleasant odor of clean animals and fresh litter. I entered with him, looked at the mothers and their offspring, heard the pedigree of each beast, and did not remark the women who were milking — here they are generally ugly, masculine, as strong as carters, and without any characteristic physiognomy — when, suddenly, almost at my feet, I saw a well-dressed, delicate person, with tapering, rose-nailed fingers, neatly and skilfully milking a white cow. A straw hat concealed her face, but the pretty hand, the graceful attitude, the easy movement, the indescribable something harmonious, noble and tender in the ensemble, revealed Mlle. Vallier. Without seeing her features, I should know her among a thousand. I discreetly withdrew; but, as she rose, she recognized me at once — how, I can't imagine, for she had certainly never looked at me — and, without embarassment or hesitation, came towards me, easily carrying the little tin pail full of warm, creamy milk, intended for her patient.

"Monsieur," said she, "I have not seen M. Sylvestre for three days. Have you seen him? Do you know if he is well?"

"No, mademoiselle, I do not. Are you anxious about him? If so, I will go to his house at once."

"Please do, monsieur. The poor man is entirely alone and I cannot go. Do go quickly."

"How shall I let you know about him?"

"If he be seriously ill, send word to me by the first person you see. Every one is obliging here. If I do not hear, I shall know that there is no cause for anxiety. Ah! Stop a moment. If he wants a nurse, tell Madame Laroze, the innkeeper's wife — the first house in the vil-

lage, on the left. She is a very good woman, and she loves M. Sylvestre."

"So do I, mademoiselle, and I assure you that I will not leave him if he is sick."

Twenty minutes after, I was at the hermitage, and found that M. Sylvestre had taken cold, and had a slight fever. He had stayed in doors that he might get well sooner; but he laughed at my anxiety, chatted gayly for a while, and would not let me stay with him. Nevertheless, I asked Mme. Laroze to go and see him in the evening, and I shall be there early to-morrow. I sent word to Mlle. Vallier that she need not feel anxious; I did not permit myself to write. She is very charming; goodness is written on every feature of her sweet face. To fall in love with her would be sacrilege.

XVII.

From Pierre to Philippe.

Vaubuisson, 20 April.

I CANNOT recover from my surprise! I have had a fall from the top of one of the towers of Notre Dame! No! It is from the moon that I have fallen! Mlle. Vallier—. But I am a writer of romances — or am I not? At any rate, I aspire to be one, and am not going to begin my romance with the denouement, or to tell you the secret before I have excited your curiosity. Attention:

Day before yesterday M. Sylvestre was doing very well, and yesterday we made our monthly trip to Paris — for I think his plan an excellent one, and have adopted it. As we are not able to subscribe to the Journals and Reviews, we will go twelve times a year to feel the pulse of civilization, and note the steps that have been taken, whether forward or backward. In the intervals we each get a rough idea of the principal events — he from the customers at Mme. Laroze's, and I from the kind communications of the primary school-teacher at Vaubuisson, with whom I stop to talk now and then.

As we do not wish to stay over-night in town, the afternoon is none too long for our sessions at the Reading-rooms. We have agreed to divide the work, and afterwards to interchange verbally the results of our separate literary or

scientific investigations; for M. Sylvestre, without being a savant, is quite sufficiently booked up in the movement of the sciences to extract their philosophical tendencies with ease. He is really a man of great force, or else a great humbug; and if there be something crazy in his mode of life, it is impossible not to catch glimpses of wisdom in everything he says.

I was curious to ascertain if my hermit had any business, any friends, any connections, in Paris. I could not see the smallest sign of any. He passed unknown, unnoticed, through the great city. He visited no one, dined nowhere. He bought a small loaf of bread at the first baker's shop, and munched it as he went. He is never thirsty. He walks fabulously fast, and I really believe goes quicker than the omnibuses. He looks neither to right nor left, and I did not see him speak to anybody but an old second-hand bookseller, who appeared to know his face, but not his name.

How glad I should be if I could attain to such a convenient *incognito;* but it's impossible. Although I pretended not to see people in order not to bow, I was stopped on my way, and, as I did not wish to be rude, could not help exchanging a few words. I was asked if I had got my railroad office yet. I replied that "everything was going on well" — a Machiavellian answer, the effect of which on friends is infallible.

"Then you're content? You don't want anything? You know that, if you do want anything —"

"Nothing, thank you," and I hurried on. I met Duport — I am fated to meet him.

"Oh! I've heard all about you," said he, knowingly; "it appears that you wanted to marry Mlle. Jeanne, and, because you couldn't, you ran away in despair."

"Who says so? Your wife?"

"No; I believe it's one of your uncle's friends."

"I have never given my uncle's friends any right to defame me."

"Bah! there are your grand scruples again. Why! I would have married her myself, if I hadn't done better. She's devilish handsome. Just turn the mamma out of doors, and it's all right."

"I don't think so. Good-by! I'm not alone."

"Tiens! Promenading with your porter! You're a queer fellow."

"Chut! He's an old savant."

"Ah! Is that it? Well! Bonsoir! Bien du plaisir."

I overtook Father Sylvestre, and we lost ourselves in the crowd. It was nine o'clock when the cars dropped us at the Vaubuisson station. I had only a short walk to take, but the old man had a good three miles; a fine rain was falling, and he was very thinly clad. I tried to get him to spend the night with me, though the house is not mine — the Diamants would have consented heartily — but I could not persuade the obstinate old fellow to sleep out of his own bed. Then I wanted him to take my overcoat; he would not listen to me.

"What! an overcoat for me! At my age! It's well enough for you, papa" — and off he ran, laughing, through the dark, wet night.

Still I was quite anxious about my seventy-three years old *infant*, and left home earlier than usual this morning, to see him. He had had a return of his cold, was shaking with fever, and crying out, even while he laughed, at the sharp pain of a spot in his side. I made him lie down, covered him up warmly, and he fell asleep at once. Then followed dreams, difficulty of breathing, and some delirium. I wanted to stay with him, and at the same time to get word to Mme. Laroze and send for a physi-

cian — so I watched from the window for a messenger. No one passed. Farfadet was very anxious; he seemed to comprehend my dilemma. A strange idea occurred to me: if this dog really understood human language — or, at least, words to which he was accustomed — I might try an experiment. Recalling his master's method of proceeding, I seized a moment of earnest attention on the part of the dog, when his eyes were fixed on me like two notes of interrogation, and said to him gravely, "Go to Madame Laroze's and bring her here" — pointing at the same time alternately to his master and to the door. Wonderful as it may appear, he did not wait to be told a second time, but turned at once to go. I stopped him, wrote "*A physician for M. Sylvestre*" on a piece of paper, fastened it to his collar, and let him out.

In less than a quarter of an hour I heard him scratch. He was alone, but the paper was gone from his collar, and he had a triumphant air. I went out to see if any one was following him, and in a few minutes Mlle. Vallier appeared — not Mme. Laroze. Evidently the dog does not comprehend names, but interprets them after his own manner, and according to his canine instinct. As he knows his master's best friends, he proved much more intelligent than if he understood our tongue.

"Is he very ill?" asked Mlle. Vallier, quickening her steps.

"No, not yet; but it may become serious. Since you are here, I will go for a physician. Please tell me —"

"Go to my house; it is now a quarter-past ten; at half-past the doctor will be there—he promised that he would, and is very punctual. My invalid will tell him that he is wanted here, but I don't believe he knows the way, and there should be no delay. Run to meet him, and bring him here."

I obeyed, leaving M. Sylvestre to the care of his young friend. We had not said "Bon jour" or "Au revoir," had not saluted each other, or had time for any ceremony. We were there by the side of our patient like brother and sister, or like two old friends.

In two leaps — for one goes quickly down hill — I reached Mlle. Valliere's. The door was open, but I knocked, and a man's voice bade me enter. No time was to be lost, and no scruples were to be regarded, so I penetrated into the sanctuary.

A young physician, with a frank, pleasant face, was leaning over a hammock in which a girl — whose age and type I could not at first sight distinguish — appeared to be expiring. Her color was frightful — a greenish yellow — eyes big and glassy, the nose too small, short, and pinched at the nostrils, the lips entirely white, thin, and as if dried around dazzlingly white teeth. As soon as she saw me she tried to speak. She evidently knew why I had come, but, as she was in the midst of a paroxysm, she could not articulate a word. I hastened to tell my errand, and she, by signs, urged the doctor's departure.

"Yes, I know," said he, addressing me, "I will go directly; but now I cannot leave."

"Must! must!" gasped the sick girl; "Missis say: Go! I, very well. Nothing at all."

"In fact," said the doctor, in a low voice, taking me aside, "there's no hope here, and there may be some there. I will run; you need not go with me; I know the old Chartreuse like a book; and since you are willing to do good, stay here for a quarter of an hour. Don't let that girl speak for five minutes; don't let her lie down, or roll herself in her hammock; keep her sitting up, whether she likes it or not, and make her take the dose in this cup as soon as the choking has stopped. After that

you can leave her, as she will be relieved for the day, and perhaps for several days. She has not yet reached the last stage of her disease, but when she has a paroxysm she wants to die, and lies on her face, in hopes of being smothered. After the fit has passed, she is more reasonable and resigned, and even hopeful, as is the case with most sick persons."

So I was left alone with the dying girl, filling Mlle. Vallier's place by her side. Either the attack had passed off, or the novel occurrence had produced a diversion, for the patient remained quite calm, quiet, and disposed to obey the doctor's orders. I sat down at the head of the hammock, and looked at her attentively — for I discovered at last that she was a negress, blanched by illness, and almost pretty; so far, at least, as a spectre can represent the idea of beauty. Then I looked round the chamber: it was a poor kind of a room; another hammock was rolled up against the wall; there were some straw chairs, a very pretty work-table, a plain bureau, a piano, a large stuffed arm-chair, and some articles of small value, but out of place in a girl's bed-chamber — mineralogical specimens on a little étagère, an Indian club, a necklace of bears' claws, a pair of pistols. These objects seemed to awaken some vague remembrance in me, and my eyes mechanically fixed themselves on the feather-border of the hammock in which the sick girl lay; it seemed to me as if I had seen that hammock in some previous state of existence, under very peculiar circumstances. Suddenly the sick girl turned as if to speak to me, and, to spare her the exertion, I drew up my chair.

"Do you know me?" said I, struck by the fixedness with which she looked at me.

"No, never saw you. Is it you, Monsieur Pierre?"

"Yes, that is my name. What is yours?"

"Zoe; very sick, you see."

"But you will get well."

"You very good!" said she, shaking her frizzled head with an air of incredulity. "I well now. Musn't tell missis I had fit. I well when she go away."

"I think that you ought not to talk."

"Oh, yes; talk of her; so good. Must be friend to her."

"So I am already; her very respectful and devoted friend."

"*Try:* for missis no want friend. She wrong."

"But the hermit?"

"Oh, yes, that one; he too old; he die soon."

"I hope not."

"Tell me, you very poor too?"

"Quite poor."

"We almost quite; so rich once."

"In what country?"

"Rio Janeiro, Paris, Saint Malo."

"At Saint Malo?"

"Yes; missis' father have grand chateau and great many servants. My father there. Oh, wicked massa! wicked and robber! He lose everything. That right! He make poor black father die"; and, rousing herself energetically, she added: "Yes, die to amuse him. He make him fall and dance and leap like beast, to show beautiful good obedient black, and poor father break something in stomach: but God punish; massa die in one week! Then young missis say to me: 'We no more nothing, no money, no father, you and I; your father killed, I make you live, I be mother to you; you swing me in hammock, now I swing you.' So we come. She make herself sick for me, she have great trouble. If doctor her real friend, he make me die quick, but he no wish. If I make self

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die, missis no love me any longer, she say; so I willing to wait. Give me that thing I must drink."

I was seized with astonishment and emotion. "Zoe," said I, handing the cup, and holding her up that she might drink more easily, "your wicked master's name was not Vallier?"

"Yes, that his real name; missis take it again. But he do so many bad things in that name, he call himself Celestin Aubry."

"But did he have two daughters?"

"Only one: missis; Esmeralda, what they call Aldine.'

At this moment, Mlle. Vallier returned; as the physician had told her, she was not surprised at finding me, and appeared neither ashamed nor disturbed. With calm and truly holy frankness, she held out her hand to me: "You are taking care of my poor child," she said. "Thank you, you are very kind. As some return, I can tell you that I hope M. Sylvestre's attack will not be a very serious one. I left the doctor and Mme. Laroze with him; but it will be best for you to return there, if you can, and carry some things he needs. Here is a good coverlet — we have enough without it — and then some sugar. Wait a moment! He must have a night-lamp, some linen, and some syrup. We have some good honey, and herbs to make a drink. I will put them all into a basket."

She packed the basket quickly and neatly, asking me in a low voice if Zoe's attack had been violent; then she thanked me again, and, without affectation or mystery, accompanied me to the foot of the steps, advising me not to let M. Sylvestre talk. He had a kind of congestion of the lungs, but slight, and easily overcome.

Thus Mlle. Vallier is no other than Mlle. Aubry. That little stunted red fright, whom I saw four years ago, has

become this charming girl, so elegant in form, so refined in tone, so perfect in grace! I might have seen and talked with her for ten years without recognizing her. Nothing of the past remains in her. Yes, there does: she is still of that common type which then struck me, for she cannot be called handsome; her nose is round, without refinement, and her lips are too short; her chin is too short also, and her cheeks too prominent. Taken altogether, perhaps she is ugly; but she is one of those ugly persons who cast beauties into the shade, and make them look insipid. Her eyes, which I did not see, as they were closed in sleep when I looked at her, are two great lights — two pale emeralds, like those that are called acqua marina, because they are of the color of the sea, when it changes from green to blue. M. Sylvestre is troubled at their having grown large and hollow in consequence of her watchings and fatigue, but they are very beautiful thus — clear, tender, and intelligent. Her hair has lost the golden hue of childhood: it is almost chestnut, remarkably silky and abundant. She is thin in person: she must have gained three or four inches in height. In fine, through misfortune, experience and virtue combined, the monkey I despised has undergone a complete transformation, and developed into an attractive, delightful, and noble woman, before whom I could prostrate myself with my whole heart.

I am writing all this to you from the hermit's, by the light of his little petroleum-lamp, for I have installed myself as his nurse. Having but one *infant*, I must take good care of him. He is doing as well as possible. I feel that I love him as if I had known him all my life; and I can say the same of Mlle. Vallier, for I am of Beranger's opinion: That the ideal woman should be neither mistress nor slave, but friend.

XVIII.

From Pierre to Philippe.

25 April, at the Hermitage.

OUR patients are not doing very well: Zoe is so much weakened by her last attack, that her mistress cannot leave her, and M. Sylvestre is so far from rational that I cannot leave him either. Mme. Laroze is very kind-hearted, but she is hampered by her customers, and her shop is never empty. For five days I have been but once to Vaubuisson, to get some clothes and a little money, and to make mother Agatha easy about me. In passing, I managed to communicate with Mlle. Vallier about the hermit, and did it quite ingeniously, as I did not wish to set malicious tongues a-wagging. Though very few persons pass by her cottage, one might always be observed by the laborers in the fields; and I believe these people, courteous as they are, to be quite as curious and suspicious as the inhabitants of small cities. So I called to an old woman whom I saw washing at the outlet of the spring, and asked her to do me a favor. She consented, without much entreaty, to call Mlle. Vallier, and ask her to come to the window. As soon as Aldine appeared, I told her briefly about M. Sylvestre's case, in the presence of the old woman, and then departed with the profoundest bows I have ever made. Aldine understood my manœuvre, and testified her appreciation by a smile.

"Well!" said the old woman, following me after the window was closed, "if you know the *musician*, why didn't you go up and speak to her? Are you in a great hurry?"

"I didn't go up, because I didn't wish to give people occasion to talk about her. Isn't that right, my good dame?"

"Oh! par exemple! If that's your reason, yes! You are right to be prudent. People do talk so, and it would be wrong to do any harm to a person against whom nobody has ever found anything to say."

"You called her the musician. Does she play on the piano?

"Yes, to amuse her poor little Moor. She plays quite softly. Ah! Dame! she plays well, too. If she hadn't that little one on her hands she might earn some money in the neighborhood. She has been asked a good many times to go to Vaubuisson and to the chateau La Tilleraie; you know — just behind the hill — two steps off."

"It belongs to M. Gédéon Nuñez!"

"C'est ça! Rich folks. They come here in the summer, and there are some little children. One day M. Gédéon heard her play some airs as he was passing by. He stopped and listened, and said it was first-rate. Then he sent a grand servant, and asked her to give some lessons, but she said she couldn't. That's unfortunate, because this young lady hasn't anything more than she needs. She has to count every sou, and yet she keeps herself well, and is neat and genteel and good, and finds means to do good to others, too. But you, monsieur, without being too curious, why are you living here?"

"I live quite far off, my good dame."

"Oh! you live over there, opposite; it isn't a cannon-shot off, as the forester, who used to be a soldier, says."

"I am there for a short time only."

"Then you like the place? Do you mean to buy the Diamants' house?"

"No; I'm a friend of theirs. I'm staying there for my health."

"Voyez vous! You don't look sick."

"Some faces are very deceptive."

She kept pursuing me, and I had to run, almost, in order to escape her questions.

M. Sylvestre is calm, and does not wander much. When he does, he is unintelligible; he murmurs in a low voice, but always smiling; he sleeps too much. His chest is becoming more free, but his brain is getting more and more affected, and, if this continues, the doctor will try more energetic remedies to-morrow.

26th. My old friend has passed a bad night, and been much disturbed. Twice he tried to get up and go out to fish, insisting that the day was fine and the weather propitious. Nevertheless, I easily succeeded in restraining him. He is very gentle, but he does not sleep, or always know me. The physician is not satisfied. I have followed all his prescriptions carefully, however, and hope for a good result. Mme. Laroze watches with me. I am completely tired out, not having slept for four nights.

27th. This morning I discovered that I had been overcome by sleep, on suddenly hearing a sweet voice, which filled the patient's chamber like a melody. It was Mlle. Vallier talking with Mme. Laroze. I had lain down, dressed as I was, upon some dried herbs. I felt ashamed of myself, and closed my eyes again immediately. Then I heard Mme. Laroze pitying me, and telling Mlle. Vallier that the patient had passed a better night, and that I

ought to be sent home, in order to get twenty-four hours' real rest.

"Yes, certainly," replied Mlle. Vallier; "I will watch to-night, with your sister-in law. I saw her on my way, and she says she can come. Zoe is much better. Her aunt has come to see her, and will stay a week."

"Your negress has an aunt, then? Is she black too?"

"Yes; she is a cook at Versailles, and has a week's leave. I am much more free now, and can attend to M. Sylvestre."

"Were you acquainted with this young man before he came here?" asked Mme. Laroze, indicating me.

"No, I was not. He appears to be good, and well-mannered."

"Don't you know where he belongs?"

"No; I never thought of asking M. Sylvestre."

"You're not very curious, that's a fact."

"I haven't time to be."

"I suppose that M. Sylvestre knows something about him; but they haven't been acquainted more than a month or two."

"Indeed!" said Mlle. Vallier; "I'm surprised. I thought they had known each other much longer. Then it's so much the more to the young man's credit that he has been so devoted to him."

"If you think that he's as good as he appears to be, I will leave you, for I must confess that I'm wanted at home."

"Yes, do go, Mme. Laroze; but send your sister-in-law as soon as possible, that I may relieve this poor boy. We'll let him sleep till she comes; he must need it."

"And then these men can't watch at all," said Mme. Laroze, as she was leaving; "they're not like us — like you, especially, who never have a good night's sleep.

febrifuge. Mme. Larose will return this evening to watch; Mlle. Vallier is going home; but, in spite of everything they may say, I shall not leave the hermit till he is on his feet again.

The sight of his struggle with the mortal disease he is now overcoming, and of the sweetness and serenity with which he has passed through crises very near to death, has furnished me much food for thought. At my age we seldom think of death, and, besides, I have never before been present at the bedside of a dying man. How easy and simple seemed the rapid sinking, the dreams without terror, the childlike sleep, through which he appeared to be unconsciously entering into eternal night. Perhaps, in order to have so peaceful a death, it is necessary to have my hermit's peaceful instincts and cheerful illusions. Happy are those who believe! And yet we ought not assent to that, if their belief be a lie. Is not truth supreme, and should we prefer happiness to it?

29th April. There were symptoms of fever, again, in the course of the night, but they were dispelled by the mysterious and powerful influence of quinine. From four to six in the morning there was some excitement, with entire lucidity. The patient called me, saying: "I cannot sleep any longer. I am not conscious of any disease. How long have I been ill?"

"Eight days."

"So long? It seems to me but an hour, and yet it is incredible how much I have dreamed; still it did not tire me, and the time appeared short. Have I taken much medicine?"

"The least possible."

"That was still too much; for, if nothing had been

done, I should now be on my feet without loss of strength, or else asleep forever, without struggle or fatigue."

"Then you have no faith in medicine?"

"Yes, I do believe in it as an empiricism which may cure, but always on condition of subsequent exhaustion. It is bad for us when we have not strength to bear the remedy; it is worse, perhaps, when it gets us out of a bad place and leaves us in a bad way for all the rest of our lives."

"Do you fear that your recovery will not be perfect? I hope that you are mistaken. The doctor is confident that it will be."

"And I promise to do my part by not changing my habits, and by resuming my active life; but it is true, nevertheless, that if you had let me fight alone with my disease, I should have been sooner freed from it, in one way or another."

"Then you feel a little provoked with your friends for having done for you as they would have done for themselves?"

"By no means. By degrees medicine will learn how to cure without debilitating. In the meanwhile she must experiment on us, and we must pay for her experiments. She has the same claim upon us, at our own risk and peril, that progress has upon our will, our intellect and our devotedness. I thought of that when I saw the doctor at my bedside; I thought of death, of which I had received no warning in my sleep, and I said to myself: 'Ah! I'm in the crucible; I shall come out gold or dross.' I should have preferred to dispense with it, and to have had to do with dame Nature only, who is much more intelligent than people imagine; but we must not live or die selfishly, and now we shall see the effect of the poisons. If this young man kills me, he will know that he

must diminish his doses, and will be more cautious with his other patients.

"Do you know," he added, after a short pause, "that I think I had a glimpse of the other side of the hill of life for a few moments? You will ask me what the things I saw there were like. Of course they were like what my spirit wished them to be, and we shall probably find it so; for our instincts are revelations. Every one dreams of Paradise after his own manner, and that is his right; but no one has the right to try to impose upon others the form impressed upon his future life by his present life. Every one goes where he wishes to go; for if death were not a deliverance it would not be a good. God be thanked! It is a good for those who accept its laws and its consequences. Therefore the lover of freedom goes down into it, and lives again with the feeling of freedom. Thus all that I saw when at the boundary was greatly to my taste. As I said without metaphor, it was the other side of the hill; only, it had a new aspect. The ravines were deeper, the precipices more imposing, the forests more majestic: I love what is grand; but there was nothing extraordinary, nothing fantastic in my Eden. It was nature such as I have known it; and the nature of our climate, which I prefer. It was simple; but it was good and true. Minute details were not wanting, for the grand is not majestic except the delicate and graceful be also present. Such beautiful flowers as I saw on such charming slopes! all those that we know and love. Mon Dieu! I have never asked for anything more or better than what I have loved and appreciated in this world. Perhaps it was this same world! Who knows? I do not want to leave it. It is fully as habitable, as rich, as perfectible as the others. But I confess that I saw it far on in the way to perfection. The trees were not muti-

lated, the flowers were not trodden down. There was a narrow crystalline stream, by turns impetuous and gentle, bounding in cascades, sleeping among the grass, or babbling over the stones, and it was not imprisoned by dams, or soiled by the refuse of factories. To tell the truth, there were no factories, and I saw no habitations. They were probably kept out of sight in order not to injure the rural physiognomy of the ravine; and, if industry did prevail in that peaceful world, it respected the sanctuaries of nature, and lovingly preserved her graces and her splendors, as we ourselves respect those landscape-gardens which are created for the purpose of replacing and reconstructing that nature which we destroy elsewhere. The natural garden which I saw was very delightful, I assure you. There were young birches clothed in white satin, and old oaks stretching out their arms covered with light moss, and under them I saw some animals which I took to be deer, and some partridges and pheasants, which did not try to flee from Farfadet; for my dog was there also, and I knew that he, too, had a soul. I could not tell you how my own was clothed, or through what organs I perceived, for I did not think about it. I did not feel imprisoned; I changed place without effort, and I was waiting — for what? I cannot tell you — for you applied a blister, I believe, which suddenly brought me back into my chamber and into my skin. But you could not hold me: I was off again in a moment, and found myself, in the dawn of morning, on a beautiful lake, on which I was swimming like a swan — or like a goose, if you prefer it; I don't want to swim any better than that! At a distance, I saw some indistinct forms — my new fellows, probably, for my heart bounded towards them in a transport of confidence and friendship which I cannot depict, and I was just going to

join them, to address them, to become acquainted with them — when you disturbed me again, and everything vanished. Ah! No one knows of what long-desired solutions a sick man is bereft when he is tormented in order that he may be brought back to this life. At that moment, you were saying: 'Mon Dieu! How quiet he is! Isn't he dead?' When I heard you, I accepted the sentence, and said to myself: 'Perhaps I am what is called dead; it may be necessary to sleep for a certain time, and perhaps the paradise of humble people, like me, begins with a good long rest from the consciousness of life. Those who are in no hurry, and who have not the least doubt, may rest for a century or two before they recover that consciousness in a better company, in a world where nature shall have resumed her pristine beauty, and men the normal uprightness of their instincts, enlightened by the sun of science and poetry. Why not? If we must imagine things at their worst, why should not the being that I am be dissolved into a multitude of beings without consciousness of the self that I am, to be slowly formed again into another being that would still be myself, even while a better being than I? Who knows, and what does it matter, since everything is right, or must become right?' And thereupon I saw what you may have remarked in this world: in early spring and in autumn, among our hills, we have heavy pearlish-gray fogs which come down to the level of the plain, effacing, swallowing up, as it were, rocks, trees and villages. When this soft cloud is over Vaubuisson, I can see it from here, and I compare it to a large bird brooding over the abodes of men, as a hen broods over her eggs; every noise ceases, every light is extinguished. Well, in my dream I felt myself taken into the bosom of the cloud, and I said to myself: 'This is it; the end of the day,

the death of the man; it is soft and maternal as the breast which broods over the germs of a new life, under the down of love.'"

Then he added, laughing, "Who said it was martyrdom? It is just simply eider-down."

This man is happy even in the very arms of death! What a wonderful organization! What a strange confidence!

XIX.

From Pierre to Philippe.

1 May, still at the Hermitage.

EVERYTHING was going on well till a mysterious visit brought great disturbance into the hermit's strong mind. One evening he was lying down, and I was about lighting the lamp, when there came a gentle knock at the door. I opened it to quite a tall woman, closely veiled and dressed all in white, who said nothing to me, but went to the old man's bedside, knelt down, and kissed his hands.

"Ah! You here!" he cried; "why have you come?" Then turning to me, he said: "Leave us, my child — leave us quite alone, and shut the door carefully."

I obeyed, and went down to the kitchen. There I found another woman, very voluminous, and also concealed by a double veil, seated before the fire. A big footman was standing at the door. The fat woman had on a black dress, very simple, but triply aristocratic in its amplitude. She rose as if to ask me about the invalid, but suddenly turned her back upon me, as if she recognized a face she did not wish to meet. Thinking that I ought not to manifest any curiosity, I went out; but Farfadet, whom I called, would not follow me. He persisted in staying on the stairs, evidently uneasy and dissatisfied, and growling in a subdued tone. I took a few steps outside. There was some daylight left, and down the road I saw a splendid

coach, a fat coachman, two showy horses, and a black shadow standing at a little distance. I felt that I ought not to go far from the hermitage, for I was rather distrustful and anxious, like Farfadet. In about ten minutes he came as if to call me; and I went back, resolved to be impolite rather than let my patient be tormented: he had not appeared to welcome the visit with much delight. I passed the two ladies, who were going out, followed by their servant. The taller one, who had an elegant and youthful step, seemed to be sobbing, and I heard the other's voice — a voice which I thought I had heard before — saying: "Then he's just the same as ever? He isn't willing?" They went on, and I found M. Sylvestre quite thoughtful. As soon as he saw me he asked if the lady who had been there was alone. I knew of no reason for concealing the fact, and told him that another had been waiting down stairs.

"What!" he cried, "has she had the audacity to come here? Ah! I was sure that she told me a lie. My friend! swear to me that if I fall sick again, no stranger — no one, you understand — shall come near me! Swear that I shall be allowed to die in peace!" A moment after he added: "Perhaps I am wrong! The child loves me, and she is good! But no! we must not accept that which is evil! We must protest against it, even to our last hour! Ah! my friend! It is very cruel not to be able to forgive!" and he burst into tears.

I thought that he needed sympathy, and I told him that, if his troubles could be alleviated by my affection, I was sincerely devoted to him.

"I know it," said he, taking my hand; "you are one of those atheists, such as I have met sometimes, whose souls embrace the religion of humanity the more fervently because they do not admit any other. I formed my judg-

ment of you at our first meeting, and I judged you rightly, for I can no longer be deceived: so many deceptions have been practised upon me that I have at last become clear-sighted, in spite of my excessive soft-heartedness. You love me because you feel that I am sincere. Well! You must know that your friend has been very unhappy, that his heart has been broken a thousand times, and still bears wounds which are incurable. This is why I cannot believe in the anger of God against the foolish and the wicked. God cannot suffer as I suffer. He can forgive everything; He can regenerate everything; but we, poor judges of a day! we are absolutely compelled to say to those who victimize us: 'Let our contempt punish you in this world, since you are not punished by remorse!'"

Then he continued, unconnectedly: "I have had children; I have a daughter — but what good can come of thinking about her? She will die some day, and then, perhaps, when at the threshold of the other life, she will catch a glimpse of light. Purification is always possible, even afterwards. Expiation is a never-failing means of regeneration. How do I know that I have not been a tiger myself, in some former existence, from the remembrance and fatality of which God has relieved me? And besides, perhaps we can expiate for others. There is one thing that pleases me in the Christian doctrine: it is the conception of that loving soul which believes it can take upon itself all the sorrows of humanity. Who knows if the tears I shed may not have some mysterious virtue? You witness them. Remember always the old man who has been sacrificed, and who excited your pity. If you are ever tempted to despise white hairs, remember what you see here."

While talking thus he wept, and was not ashamed of his weakness.

"Perhaps your tears relieve you," I said, "but you must not let them exhaust you. Can you not make an effort to distract your thoughts from your troubles?"

"Yes," he replied, "I will try. I do not wish to *die again* while thinking of these things of the present life; they are too gloomy, and you shall help me to drive away the spectres of my inner world. Tell me about yourself. Confide in me: tell me who you are and where you come from."

I did not hesitate to tell him my short and commonplace story as succintly as possible, omitting names and unimportant details. He listened attentively, and, as I was compelled, after rapidly sketching the history of my uncle's earlier marriage projects, to be somewhat more explicit concerning the third — the still recent cause of our rupture — he asked suddenly:

"What was it made that marriage disgraceful? Who was the infamous mother whose innocent daughter you could not forgive?"

"Do you think me too harsh? She is a ci-devant courtesan."

"What was her name? Mlle. Irène, perhaps?"

"Did you know her?"

"I have heard of her. It was she, was it not?"

"It was she. Do you blame me?"

"No, certainly not. Do not talk any more now. I want to think."

He rested his head on his hand, appeared to be reflecting, and finally fell asleep; but he did not have a good night; his sleep was broken by stifled sobs and heartrending sighs. Happily, Mlle. Vallier came early, and her presence seemed to calm him as by enchantment.

"This one is an angel," he repeated several times, and

pressed the young girl's hands upon his breast, as if they healed his wounds.

He is right; Mlle. Vallier is an angel. During our friend's illness I have become better acquainted with her, and I hope that she feels some esteem for me. I have not told you of our low-voiced conversations by the patient's bedside. It would not have been fitting to dwell too much on their sweetness while I was still under the burden of anxiety. If no serious consequences follow to-night's disturbance, I will write about them to-morrow; for, in the midst of all this gloom, I have enjoyed some rays of sunlight.

XX.

From Pierre to Philippe.

Vaubuisson, 5 May.

HERE I am at home once more. After slight re lapses my hermit is up and about, and I could see that the habit of being alone had become so inveterate with him as to make an excess of attention annoying. However, he made me promise to pass two or three hours with him every other day, for he likes society also, if it be not unexpected or too much prolonged.

I return with decided pleasure to my little chamber, my pretty view, and the work I had begun, which I have read over, and with which I am not dissatisfied. I see that I have been, if not biased, at least much impressed by the idealism of dear M. Sylvestre, and that my views have been modified by the force of his objections. It is very fortunate for me that I have, by chance, fallen in with a man who could present them so well, and, better than any other, demonstrate to me the full scope of my subject.

I have promised to write to you about Mlle. Vallier, and, from the tone of my letters, you see that I can do so without the least reproach of conscience. I have not said to her a single word, or addressed to her a single look, which could bring *disturbance to her soul.* I am sorry for you, my only reader; but my romance — which

has been long enough to extend from the first meeting to the first kiss — has not yet elicited the faintest spark. It is cold, but it is consistent. This is as it should be between an honorable young man and a modest maiden. If it were otherwise one of the two would be culpable: either the young man culpable of impertinence and levity, or the maiden culpable of imprudence and coquetry. Therefore the romance of love will have neither beginning nor end; but the romance of friendship — for friendship is quite compatible with romance — is already in a good way, and has advanced rapidly. How could it have been otherwise? I entered upon it with my full heart, and *my neighbor* came in full confidence.

Confidence is a beautiful thing, sais-tu! and the pleasure of inspiring it is quite equal to that of exciting emotion. There is no great merit in quickening the beatings of a feminine heart, or in bringing blushes to the cheeks of a young girl. Any fool can achieve such a triumph; but to secure her confidence while winning her esteem, is less common, and I always liked to play the delicate and refined parts.

It must also be said, that if all men are not fitted to inspire confidence in friendship, so all women may not be capable of experiencing it. To believe readily in loyalty one must be very loyal one's self; one must have no ulterior views; and I am now sure that Mlle. Vallier is one of those truly tranquil natures whom the trials of life have armed from head to foot against foolish vanities and evil temptations. The candor of childhood still shines in her eyes and in her smile; you can see that passion has never affected, perhaps has never touched her; but you can also see, by her easy and instinctively proud bearing, by the freedom of her tone and manner, and by the frankness of her replies, that she feels a real power within

herself, and that the wretch or fool who should try to deceive her would fare badly.

She does not make any display of wit, but she is witty; her character is tender and honest, indulgent, and naturally gay. She is still more than this: her reasoning faculties have been cultivated; she has read and reflected in her solitude; she is very learned for a woman, and, in some directions, her intellect is very powerful. Her ideas are formed, and two years of intimacy and exchange of thought with M. Sylvestre have had their full effect. She almost worships that old man; and, if she have an imperfection, it is that she has seen with his eyes, and too enthusiastically accepted his opinions ready made. Will my protest against those opinions injure our friendship? Perhaps not; for, in practice, M. Sylvestre is an apostle of tolerance.

One day — the most interesting of all — she related to us the history of her whole life, from the very beginning. I will try to condense it for you, without noting the questions and interruptions which stimulated her narration. I will therefore let Aldine talk without hoping to render the frankness and simplicity of her recital:

"I cannot remember my father very early in my life: I was but two or three years old when he went back to Brazil, where he had before been engaged in a prosperous business — at least so he told my mother. He did not leave us the means to live upon during his long absence — for he was more than ten years away — and we heard so little of him that my mother at last believed he must be dead. She had not been very happy with him; he was irritable, inconstant in his undertakings, and prodigal when he had money. He had consumed her little dowry; and, when I and my brother asked her about him, she said:

"'Really, my children, I don't know how to answer

you. Your father has travelled so much, and been absent so long, that I don't know much about him. But we must not accuse him of forgetfulness. Perhaps he has sent letters and money which have not reached us.'

"As we had nothing to live upon, my mother borrowed the money to start a promising little business at Rouen, where we lived. She inspired confidence, was industrious and orderly, and soon succeeded well enough to repay what she had borrowed, and to secure an honorable income. She put us at boarding-school, and spared no expense for our education.

"Seeing my mother almost every day, and feeling that I was beloved by those around me, that part of my childhood was happy; but, one day, my father reappeared with a ship, a fortune, and some slaves. This was a surprise, a fascination, a fairy tale, for us children; but our joy did not last long. My father was incomprehensible; he loved us, doubtless; but he had such strange ideas about the authority of a father, a husband, a master and a rich man, that we were completely stupefied. He did not manifest the least affection for us, but criticised our manners, said that we were being brought up badly, and informed us that we were to follow him to Paris, where he meant to establish himself, and to live in the style proper, he said, to his position.

"My mother, who had welcomed him joyfully at first, soon became sad, fell ill, and died in a short time after our arrival in Paris.

"My father did not permit us to witness his grief, and left us to our own. He seemed absorbed by a thousand important operations which we could not comprehend. In about two months, which my poor brother and I passed in tears, we suddenly saw great luxury displayed around us. From the furnished lodging where we had lived, we were

taken to an old house in the Place Royale, the immense apartments of which were filled with curiosities, and rich and strange things which terrified us. I remember especially some embalmed and mummified heads of savages, with long black hair and shell-eyes, which kept me from sleeping for a long time.

"All sorts of people — from great lords to little Jews — came to look at and buy those nameless things: a whole world who were strangers to us, and took not the slightest notice of us. We were tired to death, not being allowed to touch anything, to leave our apartments, or to make the least noise. My brother looked forward with impatience to the time when he should be sent to an academy, while I did not dare to ask to go back to school, though I wished it so much. At last my father decided to educate his son, who was studious, intelligent and gentle; but a great misfortune befell us: one day my brother committed some trivial fault, and my father — who was prompt to threaten — rushed towards him as if to strike him. The child was frightened; he recoiled, and fell down a back staircase, from top to bottom. His spine was seriously injured by the fall, and he was put under charge of a physician, who promised to cure and straighten him, but who could only prolong his life and fill us with vain hopes.

"I suppose that my father was greatly afflicted by this misfortune, but his affliction manifested itself by fits of anger, and a harshness which frightened me. His habit of command became an irritable frenzy, and I really believe that his reason was affected from that time. He certainly died crazy, and I mention this now, in order to absolve him from the guilt of causing all the strange suffering I had to undergo.

"In the first place, he kept reproaching me for my

ugliness, and pretended that it was my fault that I was small and puny; that I kept myself thin by my vulgar activity, which was low, and out of place in the daughter of a millionaire. Then I was industrious, and he wanted me to be idle; I liked to learn, and he wanted me to be ignorant; I was compelled to submit to doing nothing, and to pass my life in a hammock, which is a good bed enough at night, but which becomes a torture when one is compelled, by order, to count all the hours of the day in it; I liked to busy myself with housekeeping, and he forbade it absolutely; I did not care for ornaments, and he covered me with diamonds — ridiculous and unbecoming on a young girl; I wished to wear mourning for my mother, and he would not let me; he would hardly permit me to practise for a moment, or to open a book in my own room.

"I was very submissive, for I stood in great fear of him; but, when my mother was dead and my brother deformed, I became indignant, and tried to rebel. I hoped that my father would kill me, and I threatened to kill myself. You would never guess the means he adopted, in his craziness, to bring me to terms. I felt a great affection for Zoe, the little black servant my father had given me, and he said to me:

"'I don't mean to kill you or to punish you; I mean to get you married; and, as you are frightful, nothing but the freshness of your cheeks will induce any one to take you.' (I must tell you, in passing, that as I was very pale, he made me put on a thick layer of rouge every morning.) 'Therefore I shall not whip you, as you deserve,' he continued, 'but every time you even try to disobey, I will have Zoe whipped before your eyes by her father; and, if he doesn't whip her soundly, I'll do it myself. As for your throwing yourself out of the win-

dow, you may try that and welcome; but I swear to you that Zoe shall take the same road, and that you shall have her on your head before you reach the ground.'

"I know well enough, now, that he would not have done this, but I was so simple then as to believe him; and his system of inventing terrible and fantastic threats was a sure way to make me stupid or crazy."

While Mlle. Vallier was relating these things I kept saying to myself: "This, then, was the poor little creature whom I saw, retarded in her growth by a system of terror, with cheeks ridiculously rouged and arms loaded with precious stones, compelled to sleep under fear of mortal torture! And I contemned that poor being — I ridiculed, despised, and almost hated her — and thought that I was showing my independence, my disinterestedness, and my noble pride! This is the way fate misleads and betrays us. Oh! if I could only have guessed — I will not say the sweet beauty which was to be developed in that little girl, but the moral beauty of her soul, the deep suffering, the sublime devotedness, the sympathetic goodness, which were hidden by that sleep — I would have taken her in my arms and rescued her from that vampire; I would have saved her, have concealed her, have brought her up as my daughter; and now I should have some resources, for I would have worked for her, so that I could say to her: Be my wife; for, as truly as I am not an Amadis or a Don Quixote, I am an honest young man, who glories in protecting you. Let us forget your unworthy father, and despise his ill-acquired fortune, for no one knows better than I how far children are innocent of the faults of their family."

The great unknown power which prevails in life, and which we call chance, ordered otherwise. Here am I with a future that promises nothing solid, and almost des-

titute at the moment; for the illness of my hermit, the loss of my time, the cost of his medicines, and the trifling alleviations which, in spite of him and without his knowledge, I have contributed to his comfort, have greatly diminished my reserved fund. Here I am, I say, not in the least discouraged or anxious on my own account, but totally incapable of undertaking the charge of a wife and family. I passed by the side of happiness without knowing it; and this adorable companion, who would have realized all the aspirations of my sterile youth, cannot now find in me the support of her weakness and a consolation for her past.

But I continue the history of that dear friend, and must not forget what she said of an incident respecting which I was very curious. I asked her why, when in Paris, she had not married, no matter whom, without reflection, in order to escape from the tyranny of her crazy father.

"I was tempted to take that course only once," she replied, "and then I received a lesson which made me cautious. It is my only adventure, and I will tell it to you. One day my father said to me: 'Try not to appear too much of a fool, and you shall he married in ten days. You have seen M. Piermont here? Well! he has a nephew who is handsome and well made; not rich, but of a high family, who is to come day after to-morrow.'

"Zoe, to whom I told the news, jumped with joy, and cried: 'Oh, missis, you take me, you take poor black father too. You buy us of massa, very dear if must, but you not leave us here!'

"You may imagine that I promised everything and doubted nothing. As to my intended! Oh! I adored him beforehand — for I only asked of him, in order to be adored, not to have my friends whipped too much, and not to whip me, myself, too much. Ah! how cheaply

can men confer happiness upon poor girls in certain intolerable situations! I had been told that M. Piermont's nephew was handsome, and of good family: I saw in him a prince — perhaps a god. Remember that I was only fifteen, and had never had a thought about marriage; I imagined it to be the paradise of freedom.

"Instead of coming on the day after the morrow, old M. Piermont — who was in a hurry to conclude the matter — brought his nephew the very next day; and, as my father did not expect them, and as I had not been informed, and had spent the night chatting with Zoe about the presumed perfections of my intended, I was fast asleep in my hammock when he arrived. Zoe, who had been swinging me, was asleep also, and we knew nothing of what was taking place in the saloon. Suddenly the door opened, and we heard voices. I made a sign to Zoe not to move. We were wide awake, and we listened. Then a young voice said: 'Never, uncle; that girl is a monster, and her father is —!' I will not repeat the word; imagine the worst.

"'Never!' said the nephew, for it was indeed he, 'no honest man will ever marry Mlle. Aubry!'

"'Hold your tongue! Hold your tongue! Come away! Make no fuss here!' replied the uncle, and hurried him away.

"I jumped from my hammock to look after him; but the uncle was pushing him before him out of the saloon, and I could see only the uncle's back. I never knew the young man's name.

"My father told me that he had come, and would return the next day. I knew that he would not, but I said nothing. He never did return.

"You may well suppose that, thus rejected and called a monster, I had no more to say. I never again thought

of marrying; and, as my father did not find any other husband satisfactory to his views for me, I congratulated myself that there was no risk of my being forced into a marriage with an unworthy man."

"You must have felt very indignant, however," said I, "with that rude person, who could only have seen you indistinctly through the keyhole, and who talked so loudly of matters which should not have been spoken of in your hearing?"

"Well! not in the least," replied Mlle. Vallier, "and I even — I must tell you, it is so strange — I even loved with my whole child's heart the unknown whose harsh words had reached my ears. Those words first enlightened me as to my real position. I had never thought that it was a disgrace to marry a fortune the origin of which was doubtful. Then I recalled to mind some words that had fallen from my poor mother, and I observed the manners of the people who came to our house. I saw that there must have been errors, perhaps crimes, in my father's delirious life, and I began to suffer on account of my riches, as others suffer in blushing for their poverty. For more than a year I dreamed of that noble young man, who had justly considered me so horrible, and perhaps so ridiculous. Could I be angry with him? I knew that I was ugly. What would have been my shame and my misfortune if, instead of one so proud and so frank, an unscrupulously ambitious man had presented himself — one who would have married me for my dowry, whom I should have ingenuously loved, and who would have deserted me or trodden me under his feet? My father oppressed me, but my heart did not bleed at his want of affection. I did not pretend to feel any hypocritical tenderness for him. I had never received a caress from him, and all I knew of him was his

eccentricities, which terrified me. I endured them as one endures a hurricane, without vain complaints. If he had been good and fatherly, I should have suffered a thousand times more from his alienation.

"Shortly after the adventure I have related, my father bought an estate in the neighborhood of St. Malo. He made great outlays, expecting to triple his income. On the contrary, he ruined himself, and became so exasperated that he tried to beat his farmers and laborers; and one day, after a quarrel in which they rebelled, he was brought home wounded and dying. He survived my brother only six months, and Zoe's father only a week; the latter had died in consequence of his too passive obedience to my father's terrible fantasies.

"M. Sylvestre has told you how I succeeded in paying my father's debts. His concerns were so complicated that there would be suits pending even now, if I had been willing to contend; but I was seized with such a disgust of the whole matter, that I put everything into the hands of an honest lawyer in the neighborhood, and declared that I would retain only what remained of my mother's inheritance. This gave me a small income, of which no one wished to deprive me, but which I shall also surrender, if necessary, in a few months, when I become of age. I am told, however, that the creditors will not lose anything, and that I can retain this remnant. I went to Paris, where two or three excellent ladies interested themselves for me, and began to find me scholars, when Zoe fell ill. I might have paid her aunt to nurse her, and remained free myself, but I was not sure that I could earn enough to meet the additional expense; and even if I could do so, why should I abandon the poor child, who has nobody else to love in the world, and who, though she might be resigned, would die of sorrow without me?

You see that I could not do it. If I must lose her, she shall have had all the care and happiness that I could give her."

I was on the point of responding to Mlle. Vallier's confidence by a similar one on my own part, and telling her that I was that nephew of M. Piermont of whom she had deigned to retain so good and generous a remembrance; but I did not dare, for she had spoken of that unknown person with a touching frankness which made my heart beat a little. It seemed to me that her modesty might be somewhat disturbed at my taking advantage, in any manner, of the charming freedom with which she had talked to me of myself. As I have not told my name to M. Sylvestre — who has never asked it — and as I spoke of M. Aubry without designating or depicting him, it may be a long time before Aldine knows who I am. If she should learn it by any chance, she will be obliged to me for my reserve, and will appreciate my motive.

How unfortunate it is, however, that I am not rich and romantic! How these two strange meetings with Aldine, and the confession she gayly made of her child's love for me — for it was love, really; every young girl loves the man she dreams of and expects — how well adapted all this is to start us on a delightful romance! Oh! Reality! my sovereign! you are harsh and disagreeable, it must be acknowledged, and your sceptre is a rod of iron, especially when your subject is twenty-five years old, has a fresh heart, and his full share of imagination.

XXI.

FROM PHILIPPE TO PIERRE.

VOLVIC, 20 May.

YOU may say what you will, friend Pierre, you are in love with Mlle. Vallier, and the romance which you regret not being able to commence, is already in full progress. Well! so much the better! Why think of resisting? Since you can esteem and respect that noble young girl, and since she deserves thus to fill your heart and your mind, every heroic undertaking for her sake — whether intellectual labor, moral determination, time or will — will be of incalculable advantage to you. I rely greatly on this passion — for passion it will be — to warm your soul and bring you back to less sceptical habits. But you must hasten to get young and to love; for if I, who have not yet grown old, and who am a believer, come to see you, and find you still wrapped in the mantle of indifference, I declare to you that I will take fire, will cure the negress, and lay at the feet of Aldine my thirty years, my untouched heart, my strong arms, my humble science, and the four thousand francs income which, God helping me, I now earn. It is not very brilliant, to be sure, but my business increases constantly, and my health is such that I can bear an increase of labor and fatigue. And besides, the unknown does not terrify me. You have the foresight of the rich man — of the man who, having wanted

nothing, and now having nothing, wishes to rise again and not to take the risk of any fresh disaster. The poor man has another kind of foresight: he knows that, starting from nothing, he has become something by risking everything; and in order to secure happiness, in which he cannot help believing, he is ready to undergo severer trials still. He depends on that Providence which men have taught you to ignore by showing you pocket-books filled with income-bearing bonds, and saying to you: "Providence? eh? Here it is!" No, it is not there — money can be lost or expended; hope and will are constantly renewed.

All the above is for the purpose of informing you that the first pure and virtuous girl I may love shall be my wife, if she love me; and I entreat you from the bottom of my heart, my dear boy, to go and do likewise: love Mlle. Vallier; she is prepared to love you, if she do not already; do not fight against your good instincts, work under the dominion of love and with the inspiration of faith! Yes; believe in love, if you cannot believe in anything else; that will be the key to unlock all things for you. Feeling will open the sluices of your intellect, and you will be a poet, a philosopher, or an artist, for you will be a man.

If it be so, as I hope and wish, I promise you to cherish Mlle. Vallier as my sister; but, as I must have some food for my enthusiasm, I shall throw myself on the hermit, whom I adore already, for I see in him the idealized embodiment of all my tendencies and all my beliefs.

You must be in need of money; I therefore send you a little out of my savings. If you do not want it, use some of it skilfully for M. Sylvestre; and, if that be impossible, keep it for me. I have no use for it just now, I assure you. My mother wants nothing; we are rich.

XXII.

From Pierre to Philippe.

Vaubuisson, 25 May.

YOU are a strange sort of mentor, truly, my friend Philippe! You send me money — the universal tempter — the perfidious host who says to the sluggard: "Sleep a little longer, I am here," and at the same time you read me a homily on the narrow foresight of the rich. You scold me and you cosset me; and then you threaten to carry off Aldine if I don't hurry to cast my present and my future at her feet, forgetting that she is at this moment twelve hundred times as rich as I, inasmuch as she has an income of twelve hundred francs, while I have not one single franc. You are very inconsistent; but it is beautiful and good to be just as inconsistent as you are.

Nevertheless, I resist. I will not touch your hundred crowns, for M. Sylvestre has grown too clear-sighted to let me change one iota of his plan of life; neither shall I try to make myself beloved by my amiable neighbor — for if I prove empty-headed and incompetent, as is quite possible, I should be a wretch besides, if I disturbed her repose and compromised her future by making her share my poverty and disgrace. Therefore she will know nothing of my feeling towards her; and if I be in love with her, as you assert, I do not wish to know it myself.

I am working assiduously. I have had a discussion

with M. Sylvestre, in which I confess myself vanquished on certain points. I still think that he attributes too much importance to human solidarity, as do all of his school; but he has, nevertheless, enhanced that importance in my eyes, and the heat of his conviction appeared to me to have the value of solid argument. I shall take up this subject again, but wish to reflect upon it first.

XXIII.

From Pierre to Philippe.

30 May, 1864.

THIS morning I received a visit which surprised me a good deal. I was on my way to see M. Sylvestre, when I was stopped by Gédéon Nuñez, who said: "I was going to your house, having learned that you were here. Your real position is fully understood at last, and it does you honor. I beg to compliment you upon it. I have been at La Tilleraie for four and twenty hours, and shall spend part of the summer there. I have come to ask you to take up your abode with me. My house is yours."

You are but little acquainted with Gédéon, and I must tell you briefly what I know of him, for he is not an intimate friend. He had a stormy youth; but, restrained or persuaded by his parents — you know that Israelitish paternity is strong and tenacious — he returned to the ways of order and riches, which, in the eyes of his race — and in those of ours, just now — are the ways of virtue. All this does not prevent Gédéon from being intelligent, helpful and liberal. Now I continue:

After I had thanked him cordially, assuring him that I was not tired of my solitude, that it was necessary for my plans of work, that I found my lodging pleasant — I let him suppose that I hired it, and that I had assured re-

sources — we talked about Paris and Vaubuisson, about our acquaintances there and our neighbors here; about his cousin Rebecca, who, he says, knows how to manage her husband; about the hermit of Grez, whom he has often met, but who has never been willing to enter into conversation with him; and finally, about Mlle. Vallier, respecting whom, he said, he wished to consult me.

"I know in general, my dear fellow," he continued, "the history of that young lady, rich and ruined, honest and poor. I knew a little of her father, who, between ourselves, was a great scamp. I know that she has devoted herself to a sick servant; I know that she has talent — I have heard her play. I know that she is well educated and sensible, and a noble character. The country doctor, in whom I have great confidence, has told me magnificent things of her — perhaps he's in love with her — but I don't know if she's handsome or ugly — I've not seen her — and I don't care —. Well! I'm a widower, forty years old, with several millions. I am, therefore, sufficiently sedate, and have ample means wherewith to educate my two children — a girl five years old and a boy still too young to go to school — in the very best manner. I keep a governess, a nurse and a groom, especially for them. The groom is all right, the nurse devoted, and the governess quite attentive, but bitten by the spirit of proselytism, and wanting absolutely to get my little Jews baptized. For my part, I prefer to have them stick to the faith of their fathers, and therefore I am sending the governess away, and must have another at once. A hundred will apply, but I've got it into my head that the best of all is here — close to me — under my very hand. Her qualities have been tried, and I have ascertained that, whether she be pious or not, whenever she has been able to leave her patient she hasn't run to

pay her court to the curates, but to nurse the hermit, who is an old freethinker, I'm told. I tried last year to get her to come and give lessons to my little Sam, who has a really wonderful musical organization. By no manner of means! Then I offered to send the child to study at her house. The patient was too ill! Now here is what I mean to propose, if you so advise: I will take the black with the white, to my place; they shall have a pretty pavilion in the park to themselves, with table, complete service, and three thousand francs a year; family life or life apart, as she shall please; provided only she will teach the alphabet to my girl, and music to my boy, talking reason and morality to them from time to time, like a woman of sense, without touching on matters of doctrine. Now give me your opinion: should I be doing the right thing, and would she accept?"

"Certainly, you would be doing the right thing, according to what you have been told of Mlle. Vallier; but how can I tell if she would accept? I am very slightly acquainted with her."

"Allons donc, sournois! You see her every day."

"You are mistaken. I see her at the hermit's sometimes, by chance; we three talk together a moment, and then she goes away alone."

"But when you two were there taking care of him?"

"We were always three, and sometimes four. We were all very anxious, for we are strongly attached to him, but the circumstances did not favor any special intimacy."

"Diable! I should think they did."

"You may think what you please, my dear Gédéon; but I swear to you that I am not sufficiently acquainted with Mlle. Vallier to know if she would accept your offer, or to advise her to accept it."

"'Pon honor?"

"Yes, upon my honor!" I replied.

"Then — You can't help me, I see that. Whom the devil shall I get to speak to her? If that old Sylvestre only would — but he's a perverse old bear."

"On the contrary, he's a charming man."

"Ah! may be! But he's not so with everybody. If I should call on the young lady, would she shut the door in my face?"

"I really don't know."

"Then she's very prudish?"

"I have never had occasion to ascertain."

"I'm no longer young. Que diable! The father of a family; a settled man. If she thinks I want to make love to her, she is a prude. I never saw her; perhaps she's a fright! What sort of a looking person is she?"

"Neither ugly nor pretty; rather good-looking than otherwise, and quite refined."

"That's just what I've been told. Voyons — when a man wants a thing, he does want it. You can help me: take me to the hermit, and present me as one of your friends; let him go with me to Mlle. Vallier, and hear my propositions; then let her decide. Then I can know to-night what to depend upon, and, if I must give her up, I shall look for another. My children can't be left long without supervision, and I don't mean to make a slave of myself. I'm off and on all the time; Mlle. Vallier would hardly ever see me at the house, and she would be alone there for three-quarters of the year, for my sisters and I never stay more than three months, and I intend to leave the children there; Paris air doesn't agree with them. So you see that it would be a life of freedom for her, and the position an entirely independent one. If she likes retirement and isolation, she can be served as she prefers,

and her patient might get well, in real comfort. Come, let us go to that odd stick of a Sylvestre."

I could not refuse; we got into Gédéon's carriage, and in twenty minutes were at the hermitage.

M. Sylvestre received the master of La Tilleraie quite coldly. He had hitherto kept him at a distance, as well as his guests; he detests curious people, and gets rid of them with triumphant frankness. But when he learned that the question was about an offer which might be advantageous to Mlle. Vallier, he listened to Gédéon with marked attention, and then said:

"I will convey your proposition to the young lady. It would be useless for you to go, she would not receive you. I never go there myself. She told me, once for all, that she was not in a position to receive visitors, and that is true; but she does receive letters which are addressed to her, and I am astonished that you did not intrust your message to the post. It is much more simple, and quite as prompt. The carrier passes twice a day, and is very exact."

M. Sylvestre's manner was quite constrained, as Gédéon could not help seeing, but he persisted, nevertheless: "I did not write," he said, "because I felt sure that she would consult you before answering; and I wanted at least to tell you everything that would enable you to advise her for her best interest."

"Very well, monsieur: I have listened to you with great attention; my memory is good, and I will not omit anything that you have requested me to say to her."

"That I'm quite sure of," returned Gédéon; "and yet it is not the same as if I could speak to her myself. I might reply to objections which I do not now foresee, and even — modify the terms I have mentioned, in case she should consider them insufficient."

"I will tell her that also; and, if she do present objections, will transmit them to you by M. Pierre, since you are acquainted with him."

Gédéon proposed to take M. Sylvestre in his carriage to Mlle. Vallier's, and wait at the door for an answer; but I could see that this rather confident impatience of the rich man, who thinks that he can remove every obstacle with money, displeased the hermit, and I persuaded Gédéon to wait at home for the reply, which I would communicate as soon as possible.

Then he invited me to go to breakfast at La Tilleraie, saying that his carriage should bring me back to M. Sylvestre's in the afternoon, for the answer. I knew, however, that M. Sylvestre does not like to have carriages about his retreat; and, besides, I was rather anxious to learn his opinion of the matter in question. I therefore begged Gédéon to let me take my usual walk, and not to expect me before the next day.

"What a crafty and wilful Israelite that is," said M. Sylvestre, as soon as we were alone; "now I could swear that he has seen Mlle. Vallier more than once, exactly because he took so much pains to tell us the contrary. He's in love with her, and wants to impose upon us."

My face grew red. M. Sylvestre had bluntly revealed to me the cause of the discomfort and irritation which I had felt muttering and increasing within me for the past hour.

"Well," said I, "I really believe that you are right. I did not dare say it to myself, and now it appears to me that it is so. And yet Gédéon loved his wife dearly, and it's not so very long since he lost her."

"Your Gédéon has a very ardent temperament — that you may be sure of. I don't care for what may be thought or said about him among his acquaintances, the

strength of his feelings and of his will is depicted in his face, which is half animal and half divine — for he is very handsome from his forehead to the end of his nose, while the lower part disquiets me. No: Aldine must not go to his house; she would be exposed to incessant solicitations, and who knows to what extremes anger at her refusal might lead a man of that temperament."

It was my duty to defend Gédéon, and I assured M. Sylvestre that I believed him to be a man of honor.

"That he is a man of honor in business I cannot doubt, since you say so," replied M. Sylvestre; "I know that he does a great deal of good, perhaps by way of apology for his riches, perhaps from natural inclination. Do not imagine that I have any prejudice against him or his race; I used to have, like so many others; but the study of philosophy destroys prejudices, and the men of the Old Testament have now, perhaps, more progressiveness in their ideas than those of the later doctrine. It is a fine race; intelligent, as we, possibly, no longer are, but still primitive — that is, terrible in its instincts. No: Aldine shall not accept his dangerous hospitality; I do not wish her to."

I must confess to you, my dear Philippe, that I also did not wish her to, and that I awaited M. Sylvestre's return quite impatiently. He does not walk very fast as yet, his legs being still affected by his illness, and it takes him at least half an hour to go down to the bank of the river at the foot of the hill, where Mlle. Vallier usually goes to speak with him for a moment when she can get out. I was so afraid of meeting Gédéon prowling about, that I did not accompany the hermit. I should either have testified my indignation at the attempt in which M. Nuñez had tried to involve me, and he would suppose that I was jealous, or I should have allowed Mlle. Vallier to

perceive the fears which I had no right to express to her. The time appeared very long. I suppose that I went at least ten times up and down the slope, about half way up which is the shady terrace where the hermitage is hidden among rocks and bushes, like the cell of a troglodyte. The place is gloomy, and has no horizon, only a single small opening towards the village and valley. It is the atmosphere of mystery and abandonment which pervades it that has a continual charm for that humble and kindly dreamer, Sylvestre. There is nothing austere or really picturesque in the sometimes sharp and sometimes rounded outline of the light soil which has been washed down by the rains, and which appears in long yellowish streaks wherever it is not covered by vegetation. In those spots where the natural growth has got a good hold, the wild flowers are beautiful and vigorous, and some kinds attain unusual proportions. The paths through the wood wind gracefully, and are easy, even in the steepest places; they are well marked, and the clearings are not overgrown by bushes, while the numerous inequalities of the hill-side save it from being monotonous. It is charming to those who love every detail of nature, who like to hunt for flowers under the fallen leaves, and who can stand for an hour and watch a bird cleaning itself in the sand, as I can; but as the country is not remarkably beautiful, you could stroll through it for whole days without seeing a human face. There are no dividing walls, and only a narrow, unfrequented foot-path leads from the hamlet of Grez to the top of the hill. The hermitage cannot be seen from the path, and, besides, there is nothing in that wretched and insignificant ruin to attract the eye. The hamlet has hardly two hundred inhabitants, and they are all busy with their work on week-days, while on Sundays they bathe in the river, or fish, or talk politics at Mme. Laroze's. And

then everybody knows the hermit, who does not hide himself from his neighbors; there is nothing to be gained by robbing him, and even mischievous boys respect his retreat.

As to the inmates of the neighboring villas, none of them, so far as I know, are addicted to botany, or they have found a more interesting flora elsewhere. I have not seen a single one as yet; and, except the mysterious women who came that evening, I may say that, for three months, Gédéon is the only specimen of the civilized world who has invaded M. Sylvestre's sanctuary. It is true that Gédéon, by himself alone, may perhaps cause us more disturbance than a whole army of Parisian loungers, and my former anxiety has returned. My acquaintances already know where I am, and those who are not my acquaintances will soon know. That will not do them much good; I am not a somebody, but I may perhaps be somebody too much for Mlle. Vallier, when she learns that she confided a certain little dream of childhood to the very person who was its object. It would have been better if I had told her, and I am now desirous to find an opportunity.

M. Sylvestre came back at last with rather a long face: "She does not exactly accept," he told me, "but neither does she wish to decline. She asks time for consideration. She does not see what objection there can be; and, not being her father, I have no right to tell her. Besides, such explanations are always dangerous. Ambitious ideas may easily be engendered in a painful situation, and fear may prove an incitement to a person who is ignorant of herself. She has always been a prisoner, and knows nothing of the world. A timid prudence has induced her until now to keep herself hidden, because she had no protector. Well! she imagines that she would be safer at

La Tilleraie than in her little isolated house by the roadside, without a wall and without a guardian. She tells me that she is fearful at night, that she cannot sleep even when she has an opportunity, and that she is rather tired of the cares of the material life, which take up too much time, and restrict the intellectual life too much. This is unfortunately true; the existence of two women, one of whom cannot help the other, being much more complicated than mine, while it is true, also, that Mlle. Vallier's beauty now makes me anxious. You do not understand me? That is because you did not see her when she first came; she was then rather ugly; it is fatigue which has given her that fine tone, those transparent eyes, that light and graceful bearing. Oh! she is no longer the same person, and if she can recover her health at Gédéon's, perhaps he will not care for her. Besides, I may be mistaken; it may be that he has no other object than he has expressed, and that he has never seen her, even. She is sure that he has not, as she is always closely veiled, in order to conceal her youth from those whom she does not know, and never goes to her window without first ascertaining who calls her; in fine, she was so astonished at my questions and my anxiety — of which I was afraid to show too much — that I was compelled to fall back on the comments which might be made respecting her. She replied that one was always exposed to comments, and perhaps more so when living alone than otherwise. She reminded me of the stories which were long current about me, and of the malicious suppositions of which she had been the object for more than a year. Now, her life is seen, and justice is done to her; and so if people should talk at first about her living at La Tilleraie, they would stop when they saw her conduct; truth is sure to triumph! The poor child really believes that!

In brief, she was surprised at my dissuading her from accepting so advantageous a proposition, and I must say that little Zoe is furious against me. She imagines that to live in *beautiful house*, with benches to sit upon in *grand garden*, and not to see her mistress scrub and wash and cook, are joys that would cure her in twenty-four hours. To conclude: I am entreated to reconsider my first impression, and, without any decided revolt against the old friend, it is hoped that I shall see more clearly in a few days. As for me, I am not severe; unhappily, the need I feel of petting those I love, and the fear of seeing them suffer, have always made me incapable of directing them properly. One thing I am certain of: I have not the bump of authority; I have paid dearly enough for the knowledge, and this is perhaps what has saved me from ambition. It's a pity, *papa*, that you are not thirty or forty years older, you would be more persuasive and more inflexible than I; but your young man's face must deprive you of all influence, and forbid your attempting to direct a young woman."

What could I reply to M. Sylvestre? Absolutely nothing. By what right should we place an obstacle in the way of the amelioration of so sad a fate? Why suspect an honest man of evil intentions because his Greek profile terminates in a Fawn's beard? Moreover, why should we doubt the power of such a person as Mlle. Vallier to secure respectful observance? And, besides, it is none of my business; she is not my sister, she is not my betrothed, and when I say that she is my friend, I am using the word like a romancer.

But, after the doubts which M. Sylvestre has excited in my mind, I dislike to have anything to do with the negotiation. I have told the hermit so; and, in order that

there may be no mistake about it, I shall tell Gédéon to-morrow that he must manage his own affairs himself.

The evening is stormy, and the valley unusually sad and gloomy; the sky is low, and streaked with purple clouds, which look as if they would crush everything beneath them. The last reflections of the sunset are of a dark, coppery hue. The nightingales are singing in nervous, incomplete phrases, as if suddenly frightened by the sound of their own voices. Decidedly the country is not beautiful here. It is too pretty, and has not character enough. The merely pretty becomes monotonous after a while. There is too much green everywhere, and the horizon is so near that one cannot help wishing to get beyond it. I know all its features by heart, and the big trees are beginning to look formal. And then I shall not be alone any longer: the Diamants will be coming every Sunday, and I shall have to live with those honest people, who talk a great deal about themselves, and I know them through and through already; Gédéon, who is persistent, will tease me to go and see his chateau and his numerous guests, and Mlle. Vallier will not lack adorers, if she wishes to have any. For my own part, I don't care to have so many friends. There is nobody to keep me here but my hermit, and perhaps I shall have had enough of him after a while. He is much too easily influenced, and has no persistency of will. Practical men are rare, and imaginative men never accomplish much of importance.

XXIV.

From Pierre to Philippe.

Vaubuisson, 12 June.

YES, I have neglected you, my dear Philippe. I have been working very steadily. I have grown severe on my question of happiness. I treat it from an elevated stand-point, and eliminate every deceptive illusion. M. Sylvestre is losing his influence over me, and I really believe that my opposition to his optimistic ideal rather irritates him, without his being sensible of it. The worthy man is too patient, and I should like to stimulate him a little sometimes. At other times I am afraid of discouraging him, for when he talks of the sufferings of his past life, he is almost feminine in his sensitiveness. But I don't know why I use that word: the sensitiveness of women is only superficial and physical; I believe that their souls are much colder than ours.

I have been at La Tilleraie several times. My last year's summer clothes have lost their freshness, and I am now, from head to foot, rather old-fashioned. Perhaps I should not notice this myself, but I can see it in the eyes of those who look at me curiously. I am not sorry to have to endure this beginning of a divorce from the modern world, for, if my book fail, I shall be still more faded and ut of fashion in another year; and who knows if, in twenty or thirty years, I shall not arrive, from failure to

failure, at M. Sylvestre's superannuated costume and strange appearance! Why should I not be as indifferent to it as he?

La Tilleraie is a beautiful place, and Nuñez has a great many men visitors. Some women of his family, old and young, come to dinner once a week with their brothers, their uncles, or their husbands. This Israelitish world is admirably united, and of exemplary manners; the ties of blood are regarded much more seriously by them than by us, and solidarity of race forms in them a bond of mutual helpfulness on a very broad and wise basis; but it is not a very lively world. Certainly intelligence is not wanting, but rather gayety, of which we have the good or the bad habit. I pique myself on being positive, but am left far behind; and their eternal reference to business which does not interest me, is not very amusing. They offer me the means of making a fortune, but I do not allow myself to be tempted. I can comprehend that one should seek to enrich himself by risking what he has — whether labor, science, or art; but to risk that which one has not, by accepting advances and making others work in one's place, is not befitting a young man who wishes to be the artisan of his own destiny, and who is controlled by the love of ideas.

You will ask me why I go there so frequently. I find there books, freedom, and news. Two or three agreeable women have been brought there by Mme. Duport, and on those occasions the conversation has been more animated, the absorption less exclusive. Why should I not reënter the current of civilization, and still retain my independence as a hermit?

I mean to make that independence still more complete. I am about to leave the Diamants' house, which their children render rather noisy, and where I am afraid of inter-

fering with their plays. I have hired the cottage recently occupied by Mlle. Vallier. I shall be nearer to La Tilleraie, it is true, but also nearer to M. Sylvestre. I shall see this window and these trees from there, and my summer view will be the reverse of my winter one, which will be a change for me. I have found an old woman to take care of the house and to cook. The increase in my expenses will be but trifling, while my work will gain by the quiet.

But what about Mlle. Vallier? you will ask. Well! Mlle. Vallier is installed at La Tilleraie in a charming pavilion, where her negress is really getting well. The doctor is astonished, and cannot believe his own assertions. So Mlle. Aldine was right in accepting. She appears to be very well pleased with the children who have been intrusted to her, and with whom she is occupied all the time. As her allowance is liberal, she prefers to pay a servant, and to take her meals at her own lodging, so that she is seldom seen out of it. She gives her lessons there, and when there are people at the chateau, she brings the children, stays a quarter of an hour in the saloon or on the terrace, and retires when they are taken off to bed by their nurse. Gédéon treats her with great respect, speaks highly of her, and insists that she is not handsome. She has great success with the men, however, and Mme. Duport pays her a thousand attentions, declaring that she is an adorable person.

As to Mme. Duport herself — with whom I expected to have a skirmish, at least — she is charming with me; I don't know why. There — that's all my news! You see there's nothing interesting.

XXV.

From Pierre to Philippe.

17 June, L'Escabeau, by Vaubuisson.

THAT is the name of my new home. Outside, it is very ugly and poor; but inside, Mlle. Vallier has left some comforts, such as tight doors and windows, fresh papers, well-made floors; in a word, all that she expended of her small means to make the dwelling wholesome to her patient. It was this neatness which decided me to fix myself here; I could not have found it so cheap anywhere else.

I hesitated a little, however, before assuming the responsibility of the few remaining months of the lease which, through M. Doublot — that is the name of the physician — she authorized me to take. I thought that she would do well to reserve this place as a retreat in case of any dissatisfaction at La Tilleraie; but she burned her ships, and, if I had not taken it, would have let it to the next comer. She is a practical person, there is no doubt of that, and allows no leaks in her money matters. Poor girl, I do not blame her. As she shows so much order in financial affairs, it is to be hoped that she will be prudent in other respects also.

Must I confess a weakness? Another slight reason determined me to take this dwelling: it was the fear of seeing this window lighted by another's night-lamp. I

had become accustomed to count the wakeful hours of my poor neighbor, when she really was poor, and had mechanically regulated my own by the luminous time-piece which thus measured the duration of our common vigil. I can no longer feel any interest in it, and I like quite as well now to look at my former window, where I shall perhaps see my double light up the pane, and silently exhort me to my nightly task.

You imagine that I am vexed with Mlle. Vallier, even while I seek her society and visit the place where she resides; you say that you are not deceived by the tone of indifference in which I write of her, and that it covers a secret jealousy! The fact is that I left you in the romantic mood, and you are not willing to return to the flat reality. Well, the romance has taken another turn, and, since you insist upon it, I will give it to you:

The other day, as we were playing billiards at La Tilleraie, a carriage-load of visitors descended upon Gédéon, and you can judge of my surprise when I saw Mme. Duport present Mademoiselle *Jeanne de Magneval* to the demoiselles Nuñez — Gédéon's old maiden sisters! Yes, Jeanne the Red, the daughter of Irène the courtesan, who is a converted and purified sinner, as Rebecca says — Rebecca, a baptized Jewess, and consequently a fervent Catholic! Gédéon's sisters have been baptized also, and if Gédéon have not it is not for lack of importunity; but he holds firm for himself and his children, out of regard to his dead wife, who was attached to the family tradition; at bottom he is as sceptical as I am.

So you see that when people are in the world they must yield to the most contradictory influences, and that Mlle. Irène's exemplary devotion furnishes a passport for her daughter here and elsewhere. That lady does not yet dare to present herself personally, but this will be brought

about sooner or later, through the protection of good souls, and the recommendation of the clergy. For the nonce, the beautiful Jeanne appeared with a grand air of candor and of high-bred nonchalance; and Mme. Duport, who showed great interest in her, reproached me in a low voice for not being charmed by her grace and beauty.

Mlle. Vallier was seated near us, and Rebecca called out to her:

"Is it not a fact, my dear, that Mlle. Jeanne is an angel? Tell M. de Sorède that he has no eyes."

I objected to the *de* with which Mme. Duport qualified me, and said that such a usurpation of the particle should be left to Mme. Irène *de* Magneval; that, for myself, I hoped never to need it.

"So, you think it a usurpation?" replied Rebecca; "well, it is not, for I have inquired. Mlle. Irène is really of a noble family, and *de* Magneval in full, if you please. Now Mlle. Vallier can tell us what she thinks of Jeanne de Magneval, whose relationship to her mother nobody questions."

Mlle. Vallier praised Jeanne, and did not appear ignorant of Mlle. Irène's career. I do not know if it indicated the reserve of a modest woman, or a compromise with the world, but she refrained from characterizing her, and pronounced with much decision that Jeanne, being innocent of another's faults, ought not to suffer for them. She said that it was a prejudice to think that a good man could not marry a good girl, even if she were born in the gutter. Perhaps that was a reproach intended for me; for Aldine must know perfectly well now that I am that nephew of M. Piermont, who despised her fortune and refused her hand. I cannot remember what I was going to say; Rebecca did not give me time to speak.

"And I maintain," she cried, "that repentance and

confession purify everything. Yes, M. Sorède, you may say what you will: where is rehabilitation to be found outside of the church? It is there only, and it is fortunate that the world, which would otherwise be pitiless, now submits to the influence of the Gospel."

Mlle. Vallier agreed with Mme. Duport. Perhaps she also means to turn to devotion, in order to get into the current of the palpable interests of the age; but I mean to struggle against the filthy stream, even if it wreck me, and I spoke rather warmly against the prostitution of the Gospel to selfish interests.

I do not know whether Aldine approved of what I said, in the depths of her conscience, or not; but Mlle. Jeanne, attracted by my somewhat raised tone, approached us, and declared in a low voice to Rebecca that she agreed with me.

"There," said Rebecca, thoughtlessly, "here's Mlle. Jeanne, who doesn't know whom we are talking about, but whose sincerity replies victoriously to certain doubts."

"Whom were you talking about?" asked Jeanne, ingenuously.

The silence that ensued might have become painful, and I took pity on her.

"We were speaking of you, Mlle. Jeanne," I replied.

"Of me?" said she, blushing; "do you think I'm a hypocrite?"

"Yes," I returned, with the greatest seriousness, "it is written in every line of your face, and we have agreed to distrust you."

She saw that I spoke in jest, and that my apparent impertinence was a compliment, so she cast down her eyes and began to laugh. She is really touching in her modesty and simplicity.

Either by chance, or Mme. Duport's management, I

was seated next to Jeanne at dinner. I could find but one theme for conversation, and that was a renewal of my jest. She took it very well, and I must say that she replied to me very prettily and frankly, without a particle of coquetry. I think she is a very good girl, but I should like to see her more humble and less self-possessed; in fine, such as I imagined her when I saw her at the opera. She is either completely ignorant or entirely deceived; she appears quite ready to say to any honorable man who should make pretensions to her hand: "It is very natural that you should love me; I am in every way worthy. Now let us see how the account stands: what are the virtues and qualities which make you worthy of me?"

After all, she would be perfectly right, if she be as pure and sincere as she appears. I intended to go home early, but Gédéon detained me: other guests were expected, and we were to have music.

Mlle. Jeanne sang a duet with Rebecca, who has a fine voice, Mlle. Vallier playing the accompaniment. Jeanne's voice is weak, but sympathetic, and Mlle. Vallier plays at sight with rare intelligence. These three women were under a strong light at the piano, and are all very attractive: Rebecca, with her striped dress and dark Judith head; Jeanne, in blue with a shade of green, with her warm Veronese hair; while Mlle. Vallier, all in white, by the finer tone of her complexion and hair, formed a union between the two distinct types. In music, as in color, she produced the required harmony, and some asserted that, without being handsome, she was the most charming of the trio.

When the soirée came to an end, there was no possibility of getting away; beds had been prepared for everybody, and ices were served in the moonlight under an arbor covered with flowering vines. We separated

at one in the morning, and I pretended to go to the chamber which Gédéon had assigned to me, but returned instead to L'Escabeau, where I had a few pages to correct before going to bed.

Those few pages occupied me longer than I had intended, and I was surprised at seeing the day break through my curtains, and a streak of light from the rising sun shoot across the meadow. My head was throbbing with my night's work, and I was tempted to give it a bath of dew in the thicket which comes down to my door. I went out, and, being attracted into the wood by the beauty of the morning, soon found myself quite near to M. Sylvestre's hermitage.

I had not seen him for several days, and was just about to knock at his door, when I heard voices, and recognized one of them as Mlle. Vallier's. I did not wish her to think that I sought opportunity to meet her outside of the house in which she had seen fit to take up her abode, and I therefore drew back into a high clump of bushes just at hand. From there I saw Mlle. Vallier come out first, then Mlle. Jeanne, on whose forehead M. Sylvestre imprinted a kiss as she took leave of him; but this caress was accompanied by quite a stern adieu:

"You must do as I say, or never come here again. That is my final decision."

Jeanne tried to speak.

"No! no!" continued the hermit, authoritatively. "You may think this a caprice on my part, but it is unchangeable; and if you bring your mother here, I will go away; I will disappear entirely and forever. That is all you will gain by tormenting and afflicting me."

He went in and shut his door. Then I understood that the two women of whose visit during his illness I had been cognizant, were no other than Mlle. Irène and

her daughter. This time Jeanne did not weep; on the contrary, she appeared rather vexed. She took Mlle. Vallier's arm, and, as they passed near my covert, I heard her say: "Tenez! I see it plainly now. My poor grandfather is out of his head sometimes."

I do not know what Mlle. Vallier replied; they passed on, and Farfadet, who smelt me there, made such a noise barking about me, that I could hear nothing more. I was curious to ascertain how and with whom the two young girls had taken this walk so early in the morning, and I watched them: they were alone, and returned without escort by the footpath which cuts through the wood and across the hill.

There; I hope that's an adventure for you, an unexpected discovery! There is no need now of asking why M. Sylvestre, or M. de Magneval — for that is probably his real name — prefers concealment and poverty. He conceals his name because his unworthy daughter has the audacity to bear it, and he cherishes his poverty as the safeguard of his honor, though he could change it, as was truly said, for the comforts of life. Ah! poor worthy man! I can now comprehend the anguish of his life, and the words he uttered on what he thought his bed of death.

I did not dare to go to him at once; I wandered about for a while, and on my return found him much depressed. He said nothing of what had occurred; he would doubtless feel humiliated and grieved if I informed him that his secret is no longer such to me, but I asked myself why they should torment him so. Is it to induce him to accept a better lot, or simply to persuade him to confess to a priest before he dies? Perhaps both. If his daughter have impudence enough to offer him either spiritual or material assistance, she evidently makes the

innocent Jeanne carry her messages to the old man, and Jeanne's part is deplorable. I am strongly tempted to seize the first opportunity and speak forcibly to her, in order to prevent a renewal of the attempt. I can see that my *infant* suffers, and perhaps it is my duty to protect him, especially as he made me promise to do so in case of another illness. He is quite well now, to be sure, but has he not the right to pass his last days in peace?

But I have not met Mlle. Jeanne at La Tilleraie since then, and I do not know what reasons I could adduce to convince her. Mlle. Vallier is evidently acquainted with the hermit's secret, but it is difficult for me to exchange even a few words with her. Gédéon appears jealous of the reputation of his children's governess to an extent which I do not wish to fathom. He is visibly disturbed whenever any one talks with her apart, or even looks at her with attention. Louis Duport, whose style of conversation is not always in the best taste, is evidently displeasing to him. I would not for all the world play the ridiculous part of a dismissed lover who is trying to recover his footing.

XXVI.

FROM PIERRE TO PHILIPPE.

LA TILLERAIE, 20 June.

I HAVE been here two days, but do not intend to remain. Another musical soirée, at which several famous artists assisted, was my special attraction, but I had several reasons for staying, which I will tell you.

Evening before last, M. Sylvestre came to my cottage. He goes to bed with the sun, in summer, in order to save oil; but, this time, he did not seem to have any thought of sleep, and when I asked him if it was easy for him thus to change his habits, he replied:

"I never allow them to get the mastery of me, but, for several nights past, I have suffered from a very distressing wakefulness; my mind is disturbed, my heart is sick. I must tell you my troubles and perplexities. Perhaps you can help me to a remedy.

"I ought to have told you my history before now; after the care you have lavished upon me, and the truly filial friendship you have manifested for me, I owed you my entire confidence. I have been restrained by my repugnance to speak of a past which I should like to forget, and of a present from which I can find no exit.

"My name is Leonce de Magneval. That tells you everything in one word, for there is in the world, as you know, an unfortunate creature who has brought a sad

notoriety upon that modest and honorable name of an obscure country-gentleman; but I must enter into details.

"I am a Champagnard by race and birth, and, as I did not inherit a fortune, I served the Empire, just before its fall. I was always of the religion of liberty, but, at that period of our history, the Empire was our country, and I fought at Waterloo with all the rage of despair. At twenty-four, I was an officer and decorated, but my career was at an end, for I was not willing to serve the Restoration. So I had to live on my half-pay, and the small product of my paternal inheritance.

"I did not ask for much more. My tastes were always simple, and I had a love for study. Thus I lived tranquilly until love brought its storms into my heart. I married a person who was very beautiful, and suitably educated, and who would have made me happy if she could have been happy herself. Her conduct was irreproachable, but her ambition caused me a thousand torments. She was consumed by ennui and humiliation on our humble estate, and reproached me for my apathy. She confessed that she had married me for my ancient name, and, by incessant recriminations, she destroyed the illusions of my love. She was nervous, irritable and passionate, and, after having given birth to two sons, who did not live, she brought up our daughter Irène in ideas diametrically opposed to mine, filling her mind with nothing but frivolities, and constantly picturing to her an ideal of riches and luxury to which we could not pretend.

"Irène was beautiful and bewitching. Even at ten she was a coquette, and practised the wiles of an intriguing and calculating woman, who tries to subdue the whole world to her fancies. I strove in vain to acquire some ascendancy over her; I never could succeed. She

was endowed with a diabolical energy, and I, naturally tender-hearted, could not refuse my forgiveness to her tears, and her skilfully-played tempests of repentance. I do not know how to punish, that is my misfortune; and then my wife reproached me bitterly for any attempt at severity, while my daughter, on hearing herself characterized as a victim, laughed in her sleeve at the ridiculous position I was made to assume.

"When Irène was fifteen, our fortunes unexpectedly changed. We had a rich old relation, a sceptic and a libertine, whom I saw but seldom, and to whose house I was unwilling to take my daughter, knowing that she would there find only bad advice and evil examples. His chateau was quite near our little farm, and he came to see us once or twice; I received him coldly, and he discontinued his visits. My wife reproached me sharply, and said that this cousin was old, worn out, and near his end; that we were his natural heirs; that a little amiability on my part would have secured a fortune for our daughter, and that I had purposely repelled the good-will she had endeavored to conciliate.

"This renewed the irreconcilable discord between us on the subject of riches. Because I would not admit that a man was authorized to acquire riches at any cost, my wife and daughter asserted that I was a blind, fanatical stoic, and never spoke of me but with the expressions of pity which one bestows on a crazy man.

"My cousin died suddenly, and, to my great surprise, had bequeathed his property to me. I could not believe my ears when I heard the will read, and was not glad, except for my daughter's sake. I flattered myself that, her ambition being thus satisfied, she would become more elevated in her ideas and notions, and that, as she wanted a rich husband, she would be able to secure one without

manœuvering. She would find the luxury she liked in the chateau of the deceased, and be no longer obliged to torment herself at its absence. Thinking that she would become convinced it could not confer happiness, I hoped that she would at last open her mind to the conception of the real good.

"I was entirely mistaken; the fight became more bitter on the fresh field. My wife and daughter were not satisfied with the magnificence of their new abode. The whole concern was superannuated and in bad taste, and must be changed! They turned everything upside down. As if by magic, they transformed the servants, and even the managers and farmers, into obsequious tools. The head of the family did not understand: accustomed to a life of mediocrity, and imbued, moreover, with philanthropic notions, he was good for nothing but to ruin himself for idle vagrants, while he condemned his family and his guests to a parsimonious existence! Therefore they collected the rents, controlled the expenses, and bought horses which they rode or drove with the foolhardiness of parvenus, to visit their domains or distribute their charities; for, wishing to make friends in order to gain adherents against me, they lavished with full hands the unearned money which debases, while I desired to furnish the labor which improves.

"It was in vain for me to strive to maintain my authority when all who surrounded me, even my most faithful servants and my oldest friends, yielded to the charm and turned against me, sometimes accusing me of craziness, sometimes of avarice. Could I exculpate myself by showing the deep perversity of those who despised while they flattered them? Could I, in presence of my farmers and my household, oppose their assump-

tions of power, forbid them to command, and repudiate the debts they contracted in my name?

"My life became a hell. I could no longer find distraction from my sorrows in reading or reflection, and besides, the perpetual noise, the fantastic disorder, which reigned in my house, left me no moment of quiet. The madness that possessed Irène and her mother had infected every head. They brought visitors to me, they made friends for me, they imposed obligations upon me. I was engaged in a fruitless struggle every hour. Instinctive meekness and tenderness of heart were contending with inflexible will, and a total absence of affection. I being the weakest, must needs succumb.

"Of the two, my daughter was by far the most terrible tyrant of my life. Talented, and skilled in persuasion, she communicated to her mother the deep scepticism which was in herself. She helped to harden her against me whenever a remnant of affection would have led her to spare me. Harshly treated by her mother in childhood, she had suddenly assumed the supremacy, and the obstinate, violent woman had become the slave of her cold and reckless daughter.

"I was surrounded by vain advisers, but no one helped me. The friends and relations whose influence I solicited, found it easier to yield to that impregnable will which could assume every character in case of need. At first, they trembled before her sarcasms, and were humiliated by her contempt. From her very childhood she had by instinct conceived a system which never failed her: when she had wounded your self-love and found the point at which you were vulnerable, she would pretend to relent, to have some consideration for you, to recover by degrees from an unjust prejudice, and then employ all her fascination to persuade you that she

was your truest friend. With this power of bringing to her side those who were the more flattered by her favor because she had made them suffer from her disdain, she early drew about her a little court of which she made an army to fight against me.

"Ah! I can still hear around me those cruel and disheartening words: 'Poor man! let her alone. You are not competent to guide her, for you do not comprehend the things of this world. You are a dreamer, a poet, an idealist. It is fortunate for your daughter that she has a better head than you!' The men, the women, the whole world were charmed by her grace, and what they called her tact. At that time I reflected much on the validity of the pretensions of dictators.

"I reflected much, also, on the fatal strength of instincts, and was often reduced to silence in presence of the undeniable fact which seemed to proclaim their imprescriptible power. There were days when I asked myself if that power did not constitute a right; and if such an unlimited right in individuals ought not to prevail over my code of morality and progress.

"This intolerable situation led me towards atheism, and I do not know how I was enabled to escape it. I asked myself anxiously if it would not have been better if I had never opposed that terrible nature, if she would not of herself have found a better application of her energy, and if all my exertion of will, devotedness, conscientiousness, and earnestness in the attempt to modify her, had not, on the contrary, developed her to excess by reaction. You see that if any one in the world has had cause to question the claims of duty and of faith in what is good, it is the unfortunate man who now speaks to you. Well! If that faith has had its weaknesses, if that feeling of duty has not always been triumphant, my fault should

amassed enough to give me an income of three hundred francs, and, in my old days, homesick for France, and threatened with loss of sight if I did not take rest, I came to this neighborhood to seek a corner where I could live in freedom without too great isolation. It was not necessary for me to change my name — Sylvestre had become mine ; my face was forgotten, and, indeed, altered by age ; my peculiar and mean dress contributed to make me unrecognizable, and I had not kept up any correspondence with France. Thus I lived here for nine years, perfectly to my satisfaction, without being exposed to any other importunity than that of a few curious persons ; but I had neither a long white beard nor a robe of sackcloth, and the sight of a hermit, with a gray mustache, and in a black frock-coat, soon dissipated all their illusions.

" Irène lived in Florence, London, Baden, or wherever she had interests to attend to after twenty years of the existence you know of. Growing fat, and loving no one, she took a fancy to love a daughter whom she had placed in a convent, and whom she now called to her, supposing that she could marry her honorably whenever she pleased. That daughter is gentle, beautiful, truthful, and well educated, but she is now twenty, and no satisfactory suitor has yet presented himself. Irène imagined that I could be of use in this conjuncture, and therefore sought me out. With extraordinary perseverance, and after many vain attempts, she discovered me at last, wrote to me, and, without waiting for my answer, caused me to be surprised by Jeanne a year ago.

"The child has a good heart, and had been told that I was an old monomaniac. She came to beg me to go back to Champagne, to live in comfort as I used to do, and to let her come to see me every year and pass the summer with me. Her mother promised never to disturb me there.

"I was obliged to decline any such arrangement. As Champagnois and country gentleman, I am dead and buried, and it shall never be said that, for a single day, I voluntarily sullied the poor home of my fathers by the presence of the father of a courtesan. My name has become odious to me; I will never resume it. I do not wish to receive one centime from my patrimony; it shall remain there intact, protesting, by its abandonment and solitude, that the heiress of the de Magnevals has always had enough to live upon without dishonoring herself.

"I had but one advice, therefore, to give poor Jeanne: it was to return to the convent till she became of age, or else to go and live at Magneval with a respectable governess, whom I would endeavor to obtain for her.

"Of course she could not understand my reasons. She knows nothing, and can guess nothing of the past life of her mother, who is now a devotee, and pretends to great austerity. I could not undertake to explain the mystery, and she left me in full persuasion that I was crazy.

"They heard of my illness, and Jeanne came again — her mother having the assurance to accompany her — to propose that I should receive a priest. I know that they had one in their carriage, though he did not show himself. Recently, for the third time, Jeanne prevailed on Mlle. Vallier, who knows a part of the truth and guesses the rest, to bring her here. She again begged me to quit this ruin — which, she says, a storm will bring down upon my head some day — or at least permit them to repair it, to furnish it more comfortably, and to pay a servant for me. I became impatient, and told her that she must go back to the convent, or never see my face again. That is where we stand now.

"You see that the question is one which admits of no

easy solution, unless, indeed, you can suggest some new idea to me. This young girl is worthy of my interest. Her tears trouble me, though I resist her; and the fear that she may marry an unworthy man, or else cast herself away out of pure spite, or under the contagious influence of example, perhaps from hereditary tendency, prevents me from breathing freely; it makes me ill, — I cannot live so. I should like to love her; perhaps I ought to, though I do not know that she is not the daughter of the most despicable of men. I certainly do not love her, and yet I cannot see her without being disturbed, or think of her without inconceivable anxiety. Is it the tie of blood, is it pity for youth and innocence, or is it an old man's weakness? Has not solitude, instead of deadening my feelings, made them more tender and anxious? Is it childishness, is it the longing of my heart, or some secret voice of my conscience telling me that I still have a duty to perform in this world, and that I seek to withdraw from it in vain? Come, enlighten me; you pretend to be very practical, and are certainly very acute on questions of morality. I expect you to restore me to that philosophic calmness from which perhaps I ought never to have departed, or else to upbraid me for my selfishness, if I am selfishly trying to stifle the voice of my conscience. Tell me what you would do in my place. Perhaps I will not do it, but I will consider your advice, and shall at least have an idea other than my own to reflect upon."

There the hermit stopped, and I felt a good deal embarrassed. I asked for time, that I might reflect also. No, he would not grant it; what he wanted was exactly the result of my first impression.

"Well!" I said. "In your place, with your instincts of tenderness and devotion, I would get some one to talk

energetically to Mme. Irène, and endeavor to make her give up all claim to her daughter. If she consented, I would take my granddaughter with me to my estate at Magneval, and there marry her to some man who had pride enough to reject all his mother-in-law's gifts, and who was sufficiently in love to make his wife happy on a modest competency. I cannot say that such a man could easily be found, or that Mlle. Jeanne would be reasonable enough to prefer him to the brilliant cavaliers who now surround her; but, if I were M. Sylvestre, I would make the attempt, and, if I failed, I should have been consistent from the beginning to the end of my life, which is the only way to remain serene in spite of all troubles, and to die in peace after having striven manfully to the last hour."

"Your words are golden," said the hermit, whose eyes already sparkled with the fire of enthusiasm at the thought of beginning again, with an unknown child — perhaps already corrupt at the bottom of her heart — the frightful and unavailing struggle which he had sustained so long with Irène. But, as he is not in the least crazy, he reflected a moment, and then resumed:

"You have told me what you would do if you were I; now tell me what you would do if it were possible for you to be in my situation, with your own manner of seeing things."

"I would do the same thing, but I would do it in another way. I should say to myself that, in all probability, I could not persuade Mme. Irène to let her daughter marry to my liking, or Mlle. Jeanne to leave the world in order to bury herself at Magneval, with the intent of marrying some poor fellow who might be rich in heart. While quite certain that I was attempting a probably useless and possibly foolish thing, I would attempt it nevertheless, for the satisfaction of my conscience; but

very tranquilly, and so well prepared for the failure of my undertaking, that I should not experience the least regret at such failure. I should even be very grateful to fate for having saved me from an enterprise which would have caused me much care, and which, perhaps, would have had no good result."

"Very sagely reasoned," replied the good Sylvestre, laughing; "and you have given me an excellent lesson, my dear *papa*. I will do as you say, and I will do it with as much tranquillity of mind and heart as I can command. Forward then, whatever the result! Only, I shall not ask to take Jeanne to Magneval; I have sworn never to return there, and I never will return. Besides, the reasons for my disappearance are too well known there, and if I wish to get Jeanne suitably married, I should have a better chance in some place where nothing is known of our history. In Switzerland, for instance, where Father Sylvestre has left many kind friends, my granddaughter, if she consent to bear no other than my present humble name, and never to speak of her mother's fortune, would easily find a good husband, as I understand the term."

"There! Take care," said I; "now you are rambling off into the world of romance. With your hundred crowns income, what could you do with a young person accustomed to luxury? With the rent of Magneval you could at least preserve her from want, and, instead of marrying her to a mechanic or a peasant, perhaps you could find an educated man or an artist for her."

"I do intend," replied M. Sylvestre, "to resume my Magneval estate in case I take charge of Jeanne. With the three thousand francs income from that property, I am sure that I can support her very comfortably, even if I myself continue to eat potatoes and drink water; and, with

that income, she will marry very well, I can assure you."

"And you think you can conceal whose daughter she is?"

"Yes, since I was able to conceal whose father I am. Jeanne has never travelled; nobody knows her."

"I beg your pardon; all Paris knows her. When a woman is beautiful, and has been at the Opera or the Italiens in a front box three times, she cannot hope to travel in Europe without being recognized in any place where fashionable people go."

"Well!" replied M. Sylvestre, "we will find a place where those people do not go. Oh! I know of snug little nooks where your fine civilization has never penetrated. I know Switzerland, Germany, and a part of Italy, as well as you now know the valley of Vaubuisson. Besides, I shall not undertake to carry the mystery too far. Whenever a suitor who realizes my dream shall present himself seriously, I shall tell him everything, and he will only esteem us more highly. But I am talking as if the whole thing were already a fact, while I do not forget that it is merely an hypothesis. Only, I wish to be prepared for everything, in case the seeming impossibility should place me in a condition to act. Now help me to enter into negotiations with the unfortunate woman upon whom poor Jeanne is dependant."

I remarked to M. Sylvestre that it was too early to think of that. The first thing to be ascertained was if *poor Jeanne* would consent to enter into the arrangement, and to find means to convince her that it was for her interest to consent without disclosing to her her unfortunate position.

"One moment!" said M. Sylvestre; "I have not told you everything: Mlle. Vallier, who has quite a friendship for Jeanne, says that she is very romantic. That will

be of service. It appears that her long lost grandfather was a legendary personage, whom she longed to know, and whom she was enchanted to discover in a hermit, without having to go to the island of Patmos to look for him. Perhaps she would feel pride in attaching him to herself and drawing him from his solitude. If Mlle. Vallier be not mistaken, she would make many sacrifices to my eccentricities in order to accomplish that object, and would even be willing to go on a journey with me. During such a journey I might be able to originate circumstances which would fix her heart and decide her destiny. She is saved if love would but help me. Oh! Love works miracles, and there are young men in Switzerland and Germany who still believe in it, who are refined as well as manly, and who would readily undertake to free Jeanne from her mother, without letting her discover the reason why. I have known some of those devoted lovers, and there are some left even now, I can assure you. I don't care if you do say that the young men of our day have been disabused of all that; it may well be that in Paris there are thousands of strong young minds who care for nothing but polemics and discussion; but outside of your Babylon there are hearts that are still young and fresh, and these count by millions. There are, and there always will be, do what you may."

"God grant it!" I replied, "since you absolutely require that it be so; but I persist in my belief that you must have some stronger assurance of Mlle. Jeanne's acquiescence, respecting which Mlle. Vallier probably deceives herself. You should see Mlle. Jeanne again, and talk freely to her."

"No, I cannot bear to have any more discussions with her on a matter which has to be treated with so much delicacy; and besides, she necessarily distrusts the theories

of one whom she supposes a fanatic against riches. Some person of sound sense should disabuse her of the notion that I am crazy."

"Would not Mlle. Vallier naturally be that person?"

"No doubt, and she is doing all she can. But I confess that I rather mistrust Mlle. Vallier's generous zeal. She has another object also, which is to get me out of my hermitage at any cost. That excellent girl thinks that I am too old, that I am too poorly lodged there, and that I shall some day be found dead of hunger or cold. In fine, she has become anxious about her hermit since she has ceased to be my nearest neighbor."

I took the liberty to find fault with my *infant*, and to say that it was unworthy of him to make his hermit life a question of self-love, that I considered it puerile when treating of a conscientious duty, and that, if a desire to draw him from his solitude were Jeanne's principal motive, he ought not to deprive that young girl of the merit of sacrificing a brilliant lot in order to share his humble life.

He acknowledged that I was right, and with admirable disinterestedness at once decided to sacrifice his pride in his ascetic life, and the real love he feels for his retreat. I believe that this sacrifice will be a very great one, and I sincerely hope that Mlle. Jeanne may be worthy of it. It is with anxiety and fear that I see my poor friend embarking upon this enterprise, which may renew for him all the cares and troubles of his first paternity. For this reason, knowing that Jeanne would be at La Tilleraie again shortly, I begged him, before doing anything, to let me observe her carefully, and get some knowledge of her character and ideas. If I should discover in her any evil sentiments, or find her incorrigibly frivolous, it would be my duty to dissuade M. Sylvestre from leaving his

XXVII.

From Pierre to Philippe.

La Tilleraie, 21 June.

ONCE again I found myself placed at table by the side of the beautiful Jeanne, and I took the liberty of speaking to her of her last week's morning-walk to the hermitage.

"Ah! Really? You saw me come out of the hermitage? Do you know that I am pretty well acquainted with the hermit of Grez?"

"Do not you know that I was M. Sylvestre's nurse when you came to see him before — last month?"

"Oh! That was you? Yes, I thought so."

And then, as if she suddenly made up her mind to be frank, she added:

"Besides, I did know it; Mlle. Vallier told me. So you are that excellent hermit's friend; and perhaps he has few secrets from you?"

Why should I dissemble? Going straight to the mark was the best means of shortening useless preliminaries, and I replied, without hesitation: "Mlle. Vallier must have told you that also."

"Yes," replied Jeanne, blushing, "and she even added that you could be trusted entirely."

"I flatter myself that she is not mistaken."

"Then you know —. He thinks so much of conceal-

ing his name! If it should be found out here, he would go away at once. That's very strange, very odd; but so it is, and I am very much afraid that he will go now."

"Let us not talk about him at this table, for I distrust certain ears which are very sharp to catch words not intended for them. It seems to me that your left-hand neighbor, in spite of the enormous gentleman between you —"

"Mme. Duport is curious, I know. She is very good to me, and yet I should not like to make a confidant of her."

"How would it do to use the name of Mozart instead of M. Sylvestre's? It would be thought that we were talking about music, and then we should not be compelled to lower our voices, which might attract attention."

"Oh, yes! That's a good idea! Well! you love Mozart, and I adore him."

"You ought to love him, and I ought to adore him, for I know him very well, and you are scarcely acquainted with him."

"That is true, but then he has such a charm for me. I cannot explain it, but I dream about him all the time. Isn't he a genius?"

"His genius is the best of all — that which comes from the heart."

"But sometimes he's so obscure. You cannot understand him always."

"Speak for yourself, Mlle. Jeanne. I always understand him."

"Oh! that's natural. You're a learned man, I'm told, while I am nothing but a child."

"Well! it's beautiful to be a child, but you must be a child completely, and have full confidence."

"Which means that I must study Mozart faithfully."

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"How severely you say that!"

"I say it seriously, that is all."

After dinner, while wandering alone under the great trees in the garden, I saw Mlle. Jeanne coming towards me, and bringing with her Mlle. Vallier, apparently against the latter's will.

"Well, Mlle. Jeanne," said I, laughing, "do you want to have some more talk about Mozart?"

"Yes," she replied; "but first I want to talk about yourself, and I don't dare to."

"You may dare, my dear young lady, for I am your great-grandfather, as the hermit does me the honor to call me his *papa* — banteringly, to be sure, but also affectionately."

"Oh, I know that," she replied; "I know everything. I even know things that I ought not to know: Rebecca is such a gossip! For instance, I know why you quarrelled with your uncle."

"Oh, no!" I cried, surprised and displeased by so bold an opening. "You cannot surely know that!"

"I beg your pardon," returned Jeanne, with remarkable decision. "Oh! my dear Aldine, it's of no use for you to squeeze my arm; even if you make it black and blue you won't prevent my speaking of a matter which you think so very delicate, but which I want to talk about; it doesn't trouble me in the least, and I must speak. In spite of all the mysteries that surround me, I mean to preserve my frankness and my pride. Well! Now I'll proceed: I do know that your uncle wanted you to marry, M. Pierre, and I do know the person; but I assure you that I did not know it till this morning, and that, when Rebecca told me, I was terribly grieved. To

think that I should have been the cause of your ruin, of your misfortune, of your having to work for your living! Yes, when I heard it, I was almost angry with my poor mother, whose duty it certainly was to reconcile you with M. Piermont, at any cost. Then, just think of the ridiculous and stupid situation in which I am placed! It enters into your uncle's head to get you married, when you prefer to remain single, or, at any rate, not to marry a person whom you do not know, merely because she is rich. That does you honor, certainly. On her side, mamma, who apparently believes that I will accept the man of her choice without knowing him, encourages your uncle's fine project without consulting me! And so a family misfortune falls on your head! Ah! you ought to hate me; but I assure you that I am not to blame, and that I shall scold mamma roundly."

What do you say, my dear Philippe, to such a tirade from a good-hearted but light-headed little girl, — a spoiled child, if there ever was one, — badly brought up, certainly, but perhaps with excellent qualities, nevertheless? I was completely dumbfounded; and yet there was such an air of sincerity under this gross impropriety, that I had to do the best I could, and wind up with thanks at the close of a little lecture. I am not sure that I behaved very properly myself, and that I did not appear like a proud pedant; for I could not bear to have her pity me for being poor, and for having to work for my living, especially before Mlle. Vallier, who works under much more disagreeable circumstances than I, and who is much more worthy of sympathy. I was also disturbed by the strangely impassive attitude and systematic silence of my former friend, standing there b[illegible] us like a confidant or a chaperon. This af[illegible] nerves, — I don't know why, — and, unable to

any longer, I asked her what she thought of the explanation volunteered by Mlle. Jeanne. It was with difficulty that she brought herself to answer; but at last she confessed that, in coming, she had supposed that the conversation was to be about M. Sylvestre. "All the rest," she added, "appears to me superfluous, to say the least, and Jeanne understood by my silence that I did not approve it."

"Oh! you are perfect, we all know that!" said Jeanne, kissing her shoulder, "and are ready to acknowledge it; but you are not placed in an equivocal position, as I am."

"Equivocal!" I exclaimed. "Please tell us, Mlle. Jeanne, what you mean by that."

"I don't know, really," she replied; "it's a word that I hear whispered all around me, and which perhaps means that I am to be very unhappy. Why, I am sure I don't know. I only know that I haven't deserved it, and I'm fully determined to fight against my destiny as soon as I can get any clue to it. To judge from my grandfather's strange behavior, my mother must have wronged him somehow, but if so, she does not know it or understand it, for she's so good to me that she cannot have been very naughty to him. She doesn't seem to have any idea of blaming herself, or of repenting, either; therefore it must come from holding different opinions, and that is where my ideas got confused. Can we and ought we to separate, and break family ties, just because we don't think alike on philosophy or politics? And then I ask myself if politics and philosophy don't do more harm than good in this world, and if in telling me to convert my grandfather, whom the attempt offended very much, mamma did not make me commit a great mistake, if nothing more. The manner in which my grandfather answered me, convinced me that he is very far from being

an atheist, and that his soul is perhaps worth a thousand times more than the souls of many pious people I am acquainted with. Besides, he's more tolerant than they are, for he said to me, 'Be good, and go back to the convent, if you believe what is taught there. If you are sincere and pure, God will bless you.' Therefore I like my grandfather's religion, and, if he will teach me, I will go with him wherever he wishes. Mamma cannot help consenting, and she may be very sure that I shall always love her, and that her father will not prevent me. Isn't that true, M. Pierre?"

"You may be very sure of it: I know of no more generous or tender heart than M. Sylvestre's."

"Ah! I like to hear you say that! And how well he talks! How eloquent my grandfather the hermit is! And how handsome, with his great black eyes, his thick gray hair, all in curls, and his picturesque costume!"

Picturesque costume! It almost took away my breath. Then I remembered that M. Sylvestre, when at home, in order to save his famous frock-coat, wraps himself up in some kind of a travelling-blanket which he has cut and fashioned in a peculiar way, and which he dignifies with the name of dressing-gown. Chance, or perhaps his instinctive natural taste, has unwittingly made of it something quite pleasing in color and shape. Then his hair is still really magnificent, and he does not cover it in the house; but, when he goes out, he gathers it under a black cap, which comes down to his eyebrows, and which, by concealing his fine forehead, gives an undue relief to the prominence of his nose. He adopted this cap, which is triumphantly surmounted by an entirely napless hat, at the time when he wished to efface every vestige of resemblance to the man whom he did not wish to be[illegible] precaution is quite unnecessary now, when ever[illegible]

forgotten him, but the habit has prevailed, and the frock-coat, which dates at least as far back as the glorious days of July, is something so fantastic on his long thin body, that I should be very much afraid of the effect of such an apparition upon the romantic Jeanne, if she happened to see her grandfather hunting for frogs in the ditch, or collecting snails in the field to supply luxuries for his table at the hermitage.

I thought it right, therefore, to ask Mlle. Vallier, in her presence, if she did not think excited imagination, rather than real attachment, was at the bottom of the attraction which Jeanne experiences for M. Sylvestre. Jeanne, herself, was about to reply, when she thought she heard Mme. Duport calling her. She left us suddenly, saying:

"Remain here and I will come back at once. Oh! don't be afraid — I can throw the curious Rebecca off the scent. The concert will not begin before ten, and I have a thousand things to say to M. Pierre."

She passed like a sunbeam into the shade, and I remained alone with Mlle. Vallier.

I was very anxious not to appear agitated at this unexpected tête-à-tête, and, continuing the conversation quite unconcernedly, I asked her why Mlle. Jeanne, who must know my family name, called me M. Pierre so familiarly, as if I were her cousin, or a friend of her childhood.

"It is my fault, probably," replied Mlle. Vallier; "I have known you for three months under the name of M. Pierre, as you bore no other, and, in speaking of you with Jeanne, I have continued to call you so from habit. Thus she has become accustomed to do the same. Besides, she is quite inexperienced; but that is a merit in her, and —"

I interrupted Aldine. I was not listening, being occupied by my own thoughts. I could not help remembering a charming avowal much more refined than Jeanne's mad-

cap confession. Now that she knows who I am, had not the moment come to make the amende honorable? So, without reflecting too much upon consequences, and carried away by an irresistible impulse, I interrupted her to say that I cared little for Mlle. Jeanne's familiarity, but that I regretted that the time had gone by when, calling myself M. Pierre, I could imagine that Mlle. Vallier had a little esteem and friendship for me. I added that I understood the extreme reserve which should prevail between us now that she was under the eyes of a world less benevolent than our friends the peasants of the valley, but that I wished to seize this, perhaps my only, opportunity, to renew to her the homage of my respect and sympathy.

Alas! I lied a little; for my respect and sympathy have somewhat diminished since she has been willing, notwithstanding M. Sylvestre's advice, to trust to Gédéon Nuñez' still problematical protection; but, as I have seen nothing which gives me a right to suspect evil, I felt that I ought to pay an old debt, in order that there might be no further question about it.

She thanked me for my compliment, but, more prudent or more modest than Jeanne, did not appear to understand its retrospective extent. She assured me with some reserve that her esteem for me had only increased since she had learned the circumstances of my position, and added with rather singular earnestness that *Jeanne* had been much impressed by the merit of my conduct, although she had explained herself poorly; that my success with M. d'Harmeville, who is known to be so particular and severe in the conduct of his "Revue," had been a triumph for me which *Jeanne* had appreciated very much; in fine, that *Jeanne*, far from being angry with me on account of the past, was quite disposed to follow whatever advi[illegible] give her respecting her grandfather.

We were walking in a narrow alley which brought us nearer to the house, and Mlle. Vallier did not seem inclined to wait for the return of her companion, as she had quickened her pace since we had been alone.

"Well," said I, "since we have a few minutes to spare, and you prefer to speak only of Jeanne, that is of M. Sylvestre, since it is on his account that we are so solicitous about her, let us — "

"One moment," returned Mlle. Vallier. "It is not on her grandfather's account only that I am anxious about her. I love her sincerely, because she deserves it."

"Then let us sum up in a few words. Do you, on your soul and conscience, believe that he owes her his protection, in spite of all the care, labor and trouble which it may occasion him?"

"Yes, I do believe it fervently. She is a child full of small defects and great good qualities. If she do give her grandfather some trouble, she will also bring him happiness; and, whatever he may say, these joys and pains are necessary to his existence, for his heart will never grow cold."

"I agree with you there, but cannot so easily accept your estimate of Mlle. Jeanne. I do not know enough about her, and hitherto she appears to me to be romantic and flighty, rather than tender and submissive. Let us wait awhile before deciding. Is it not possible that you see in her the reflection of your own qualities?"

"No — and I have a very important reason for not wishing to lose any time. Jeanne already perceives that there is something unpleasant and abnormal in her position, and at any moment, chance, an indiscretion, or a malicious word, might enlighten her completely. If we can save her from the shame and sorrow of knowing her mother's infamy; if we can protect her from the evil

influences which such a discovery might exert upon her, and place her, still ignorant and confiding, in the hands of M. Sylvestre, it will be infinitely better for her and for him."

"You are right, and I yield. We must therefore see how we can separate the mother and daughter without enlightening the latter; we must find some one who will talk to that woman. It cannot be I; I am too young, and not sufficiently acquainted with her; perhaps it should not be any of the persons here, because all must remain in ignorance of the connection between the hermit of Grez and the too famous Irène."

"You forget that one of those persons knows everything, and that she would give her life to save M. Sylvestre from the terrible suffering of an explanation with his unworthy daughter. That person is myself."

"You!" I cried. "You will not think of such a thing! You cannot go to see that woman! Your friends will never permit it! Gédéon —"

"Well! What of M. Gédéon? You think that he would discharge his children's governess if he heard of such a step? Perhaps he would be right, but he would not do it, for he yields to the current as much as any one. He sees that hypocrisy is in the ascendant, and, owing to Mme. Irène's feigned devotion, it is by no means impossible that she will yet be introduced here. Mme. Duport is working for her; in the meanwhile time is passing, and I must see Mme. Irène."

"Then you will go to her house?"

"Certainly not. I will get Jeanne to tell her that her father wishes to see her at the hermitage. I shall be there to receive her, while you keep M. Sylvestre away in the wood."

"But what can you say to such a woman to convince

her? She has neither heart nor conscience, and is incorrigibly hyprocritical and vile."

"She loves her daughter, and I shall talk to her of her daughter only."

"I do not believe that she loves her daughter."

"Is it possible?"

"It is even probable. She loves her as she might a doll which she could dress up and exhibit. Such a creature has no feeling but vanity."

"Then I shall attack her by her vanity. I will show her that, in her position, no triumph can be greater than to secure the most honorable and most disinterested of men for a son-in-law."

"You will deceive her, for she will flatter herself that she can rely upon the forgiveness of a man who, if he respect himself, will never see her."

"Well! I will try something else; but that is a secret, and I will not tell you, for you have not faith enough. You would destroy my confidence, and I need it all in order to succeed. There's Jeanne coming back, and I am sure that Mme. Duport is following or watching her. Let us disappoint the curiosity of the one, and not encourage the imprudence of the other. If you will take that alley to the left, and disappear, I will go forward and meet Jeanne."

I obeyed, thinking that Mlle. Vallier displayed great wisdom and presence of mind, while my bad habit of doubting everything at once whispered in my ear that, perhaps, the charming Aldine was unwilling to awaken other suspicions on her own account. I do not know if we had been watched or not, but, after I had made a long circuit in the park, and had ensconced myself in a corner of the saloon, at quite a distance from Jeanne and Aldine, Gédéon came and took a seat by my side, as if to listen to the music. He is passionately fond of it, and, like most

Jews, is admirably gifted in that respect. At the close of the first piece he fell into a kind of ecstasy, and seized my hands like a man who is under the influence of wine.

"Be calm," said I. "I am not the author of *Moïse*."

"No matter," he replied, laughing, "I love you and I esteem you. Oh! very particularly, I assure you. Don't take that for a mere compliment. I know men too well to have much esteem for many."

"And why do you esteem me so much, my dear Gédéon? What have I done that is so remarkable and so deserving?"

"I do not say that you have done anything wonderful, my dear, but your character is by no means a common one. At any rate, I know what I am about, and it will not be my fault if you do not make your way in life."

Was he thanking me for not having paid my court to Mlle. Vallier, or was he trying to bribe me not to do so?

Mlle. Jeanne went away with Mme. Duport at two o'clock, and I remained. Why? It is foolish, I know, but I want to ascertain if Gédéon thinks that I am playing a ridiculous or a contemptible part. I have had terrible doubts about the merit of my work, and about d'Harmeville's sincerity towards me. Perhaps Gédéon is one of the principal stockholders in d'Harmeville's "Revue," and his money may have done more for me than my own merit! D'Harmeville is a very honest man, but certain influences must have their weight when the person to be favored is not an absolute idiot!

In fact, my position torments me. I have not been willing to entertain even a thought of love for Mlle. Vallier: my conscience forbade me; and perhaps, while I have been thus on my guard, that virtue so pure and so respected has been the object of bolder desires and better founded hopes! I won't care for that, however; there are days when one says to one's self that two beautiful eyes are always

two beautiful eyes, whether they be gray, or blue, or black, and that there are a great many beautiful eyes everywhere; but if Gédéon, in his vanity, persuade himself that he has supplanted me, and that, from motives of calculation or gratitude, I allow myself to be supplanted with a good grace —. But the whole thing annoys me, and I could almost wish that I had never seen Mlle. Vallier. I have therefore determined to ascertain how the matter really stands, for the sake of my own peace of mind, and, as they graciously try to keep me, I shall stay till I get at some certainty about the truth. I am willing enough to take an interest in Mlle. Jeanne's romantic position, but my own position, also, is perhaps rather equivocal, as that little girl says; and a poor devil who is making his first appearance in a difficult career, ought to be very careful to enter upon it by the right way.

XXVIII.

From Pierre to Philippe.

La Tilleraie, 22 June.

THE task I have undertaken is a very painful one to me: it is that of a spy or an inquisitor; but what else can I do?

This morning I was prowling round the park, like a regular detective, and saw Mlle. Vallier leave her pavilion and go to the mansion-house to give the children their lessons. Why doesn't she give them at home, since she has her own piano?

Seeing the negress watering a rose-bush near the pavilion, I walked in that direction as if by chance, and naturally stopped to inquire about her health. "Ah! I cured, good monsieur! and so happy! We rich now. Handsome house, handsome rooms. Come see."

"No, Mlle. Zoe, that would not be proper. I ought not to go in."

"Missis never know."

"So much the more reason."

"Then look in open window. See! Pretty saloon, beautiful paper, all pink, ceiling all bordered with gold! Ah! so much handsomer than old massa's."

"Still I see some ugly things which were his, and which Mlle. Vallier has kept as precious."

"Great pistols and claw-collar? That poor black father's. Never throw away his things!"

"And those tomahawks? Those moccasins?"

"That missis' brother's. Never throw his things away neither. That his picture; you see? Poor little fellow! Missis love that more than everything. She cry every day when she look at it."

"Even since she came here?"

"More than ever."

"And yet she is contented here?"

"Content for me, yes; for self, no. Monsieur plague her so."

"Ah! M. Gédéon plagues her?"

"Such nice man, too! He be her husband when she willing; very good husband, very handsome, very rich."

"And she no willing?"

Then Zoe, seeing that I talked like her in order to hurry the conversation, laughed so loud and long, with open throat, that it seemed as if she would never stop. Fortunately, she began to cough, or she might be laughing still.

I finally succeeded in learning from the simple girl everything that takes place between Gédéon and Mlle. Vallier. It appears that he pays his court openly in the presence of Zoe, who, by order of her mistress, never leaves her when he comes lounging round the pavilion — like me. He never enters, and there is no need to keep him at a distance; he keeps himself there, and behaves precisely like a man who is earnest in his intentions of marriage. Zoe's presence does not restrain him from offering his heart and hand; and, even before his children, whom he often brings with him, he talks about his projects, so as not to be understood by them, indeed, but in so honorable a manner that they might understand without losing any of their respect for him or for Mlle. Vallier. Such, at least, is Zoe's opinion.

As for Mlle. Vallier, she replies as if she did not take the offer seriously, and discourages him so much that Zoe is afraid, and in despair: "Missis no reasonable; not wish marry never. Handsome M. Gédéon marry somebody else if she go on so."

I did not care to ask too searching questions, or to appear too curious; I was also afraid of being detected in the disgraceful occupation of questioning a servant. So I went away, pretending to discourage her from saying any more, in order to make her wish to talk still more another time. I went into the villa as if to get a newspaper from the drawing-room. Mlle. Vallier gives the children their lessons in a more private parlor on one side, and the noise of the chords which little Sam was playing covered that of my footsteps. Mlle. Vallier had her back turned towards me, and, for the first time since I have known her, I could examine her at my leisure. I could not see her face, which was bowed over the music, but I gazed quietly at her beautiful hair, so soft and of so lovely a shade, lying in enormous masses upon her white strong neck, and at her back, tapering at the shoulders, of exquisite contour, supple as a vine, and dressed so modestly that you would not dare to look at it, if she knew you had the intention to do so. You can see in everything about her, even in the smallest fold of her dress, the mark of an instinctive propriety — neither sought for nor affected, for then it would not be real — a something both modest and proud, indicating perhaps indifference to success, or unconsciousness of beauty, on her part. I asked myself if it were possible that Gédéon, free in heart and will, could refrain from falling madly in love with that young woman whom no one can see without experiencing a decided attraction, as if her austerity concealed the richest treasures of tenderness and love. At the same time I said to myself that if she could be

other than she appeared, she must be a most consummate hypocrite — or else, that I was a most consummate fool.

Suddenly, on leaning forward a little in order to see better, I became aware of a mirror in which she could also see me, and I hurried away in confusion, like a school-boy detected in a fault. Dissatisfied with myself, I went to see M. Sylvestre. I wanted to talk with him about Jeanne, and I talked of nobody but Mlle. Vallier. I reproached him for thinking of going away with a granddaughter whom he did not know, instead of staying to watch over and guide that adopted daughter who had shown so much affection for him, and who perhaps needed his advice and his warnings. He replied that he felt quite easy on her account: "Your Gédéon Nuñez has been to see me again, and talked to me with open heart, as he said. He still pretends that he is not in love, and asserts that he is not a man to be carried away by a fancy; but he insists that he must marry again: his children need a mother, and his sisters do not understand the management of the house. He says that Mlle. Vallier is his ideal of good sense, of sweetness, of propriety and elegance; his children love her, his servants respect her; he wants to show, he says, that an Israelite may be as disinterested as any other man, and does not always make marriage a matter of business. To sum up, he, in some sort, asks Aldine's hand of me, for he urges me to influence her in his favor."

"And you have promised?"

"Yes, certainly; I promised to speak for him, and shall do so, unless she give me a good reason to the contrary. Unfortunately, I do not often see her now: she has duties to perform, and I never go to a chateau; but I might go near there, up the hill, to the edge of the wood, and she could come and talk with me for a quarter of an hour. Tell her so from me, and ask her to fix a day."

"So you expect me—?"

"But why not? You have never been in love with her. You don't want any love; you don't believe in it."

I was not sure whether M. Sylvestre meant to make fun of me or to punish me; but I did not show any embarrassment, and promised to carry the message, adding: "Must I plead my friend Gédéon's cause, also?"

"Why not, if he be really your friend, and deserve to be?"

"He has given me no such commission, nor has he confided in me."

"Then don't interfere."

I informed him of Mlle. Vallier's resolution to speak to Mme. Irène, and of the meeting at the hermitage, which she must already have arranged with her. He was much moved by this proof of her affection, and taking me by the hand, said, as he was leaving me: "My friend Pierre, Mlle. Vallier is a generous and intrepid soul! I know how much such a step must cost her. Ah! I am sorry that you are not in the independent position of your friend Gédéon; perhaps you would then comprehend that love can be made the wisest business of life."

"Do you, who have been so unhappy in your marriage, say that?"

"That was my own fault; I ought to have made a better choice. It is our fault if we deceive ourselves. God, who made love, did not forbid discernment. Remember this: no man has ever any right to complain in such a case, and the best thing for him to do when he suffers the penalty of his blindness, is to suffer without shame and without weakness. That is the only way in which he can make expiation."

I returned to La Tilleraie by the summit. Thence I looked down, on one side, upon the whole valley of

Vaubuisson; on the other, upon an immense plain, the tall crops of which were moving like the sea when swept by a breeze. I must have been very much preoccupied for some time not to have remarked the change which has taken place in the aspect of the country. The grass and grain have grown so vigorously that I can no longer distinguish the lines of the narrow roads, and the apple-trees, in the midst of this luxuriant vegetation, look as if they were set in basins. The small, low houses scattered through the fields are also hidden to their little roofs in a forest of verdure. The fertility of this soil is almost frightful. It is true that the peasant works his ground fourteen hours a day and does not leave a single weed; but fruitful Nature laughs at him, for the weeds, thrown out upon the sides of the roads and into the ditches, grow there, one upon another, in perfect exuberance. I have never seen wild flowers and grasses so rank and so flaunting. The streams do not see the sun, and the earth seems smothered by the fleece which covers it. The trees are so laden with fruit that their branches look as if they were bowed down with fatigue and exhaustion. In the midst of this unexampled richness there is something that saddens and oppresses me. M. Sylvestre would have made reflections upon this abundance with which the earth overflows without dispensing comfort to the class that sows and reaps. I do not pretend to any such humanitarian sentimentality, but was simply sad and weary when I got back to La Tilleraie.

XXIX.

Jeanne de Magneval to Mlle. Vallier.

22 June, Paris.

MY dear guardian angel: Mamma will go to the hermitage day after to-morrow, at two in the afternoon. She is so happy that her father has consented to see her that she has been thanking God for it all the morning. I very much fear that she may have wearied Him a little by so much blessing and praying, for really it does not take long to say that we love Him and are happy, and I cannot see that three hours spent in a church add anything to the strength of our feelings for Him.

Dear friend, then you think that mamma will consent to the idea of my taking a journey with my grandfather? Will the journey be amusing? I am sure I cannot tell, but if *he* wishes it — Did *he* speak of me again? It seems to me that *he* does not hate me any longer. Why did *he* hate me before? Was it on account of my red hair? No! Everybody says that it is handsome, and mamma is proud of it. So it must still be that hateful mystery, which nobody will explain to me! No matter! I will find it out by and by, you shall see. Grandfather will not be so impenetrable as mamma and you, and I will not be put off forever.

I have told mamma everything that I said to you about M. Pierre: I have no secrets from her. She does not like him: she says so; but she also says that if he pleases

me and I can bring him back to me, she will forgive him everything. Isn't she a good mother? As for you, you're a naughty friend not to talk about *him* in your letters. You're afraid that I think too much about him! If I do, it's your own fault. Why did you tell me so much good of him? No matter, you're my good angel, and I love you with my whole heart. But there are days when you are naughty, my beautiful dear. Don't you think you've scolded me enough for having spoken to M. Pierre about the failure of our projected marriage? You say that it was coquetry. Well! Suppose it was! Haven't I a right to wish to please a young man who has no fortune, and who is not so very handsome, when I am one of the beauties of Paris, as they say? What crime is there in my feeling generous and disinterested, and in expressing myself frankly? If he doesn't understand me, it's because he has no heart; but Rebecca, who is much more satisfactory than you, swears that he has, and that he's in love with me, and that his resisting and denying it is a proof of it. Well! We shall see!

I have just been ordering a dress. Oh! my dear! You shall see it! Such a wonder! An Algerine gauze with an almost invisible thread of silver running through it! So exquisite! The sixteen yards of the skirt go through my ring without rumpling! And besides that, Dorothea has invented a new style of dressing my hair which gives it a much finer effect! Apropos! Why won't you take a day's vacation and come and dine with us some Sunday? Mamma would be glad to have you! And she says that if you will be my dame de compagnie she will give you double what you get from M. Nuñez! Do think of it; it would be well worth your while, and I should be so happy with you! Try to have another musical soirée at La Tilleraie soon. Paris is very dull.

XXX.

From Pierre to Philippe.

L'Escabeau, 24 June.

THE hermit spent the afternoon with me while Mlle. Vallier was in conference with his daughter at the hermitage. While waiting the result, he was so excited and agitated that he could not keep quiet, but the Diamant family came to my house quite opportunely, to distract his thoughts. These excellent people pass their Sundays and holidays at Vaubuisson, and, when I do not go for them, they come for me to take a walk. They brought me news of my uncle: he knows where I am, and somebody has told him that I am earning *a great deal of money*. He wants me to go and see him; I will do so, and let him believe that I am very rich.

The Diamants and the hermit have conceived a great friendship for each other, having already met several times at the river-bank. The worthy old adventurer, who once had eighty thousand francs income, and then sixty-three francs in his pocket as his whole resource, has followed, as I told you, all sorts of trades. He is consequently well acquainted with industrial life in all its forms, and this perfect gentleman talks with the Diamants, as if he were one of the craft. He told them that he had been a workman, and they don't know what to make of him; for, while he has such practical information about

business in all its branches, he possesses also that refinement of manner and aristocratic grace of which our small citizens are better judges than is generally imagined.

"Just look at that man," said Mme. Diamant; "he may have worked with his hands, but he has always been somebody. I don't mean to say that we work-people haven't just as fine feelings as he: as to that, M. Diamant is not below a senator or an archbishop, but when one has not received an education, one does not know how to make one's self valued. If your old hermit will only live in our small house at Vaubuisson and give such lessons as he pleases to the children, we can make him much more comfortable than he is now, and be greatly obliged to him into the bargain, for education is everything."

The hermit declined the proposal, alleging that he was too old, and that he had lost his memory and forgotten everything. The Diamants insisted a good deal, nevertheless. Their two boys are not doing well in Paris; they are real little Auvergnats, who need the fresh air, and who would rather climb a chimney in order to breathe it on the housetops, than study in school. The parents' complaints and anxieties gave me the idea of rendering them a service, and manifesting my friendship at the same time. As the children spend their vacation at Vaubuisson, I offered to be their teacher for two hours a day, and to examine into their qualifications in order to ascertain the direction which had best be given to their future life. M. Diamant's gratitude reached its climax when I informed him at the same time that, on my recommendation, Gédéon would become his customer. Gédéon will give him plenty of work, for, ever since Mlle. Vallier has been at his place, he can find nothing elegant enough to make him young again, and, fifteen times a day, he curses his

German tailor, who, he says, makes him look like Dr. Faust before his compact with the devil. I wish it were so.

At last we succeeded in getting away from our good friends, and, seeing Mme. Irène's carriage drive off towards Paris, we went to wait for Mlle. Vallier in the wood; but it seemed to me that I was one too many for what she had to tell the hermit, as I remarked a certain embarrassment on her part when she saw that I was with him; so I hastened to leave them together. The hermit joined me again in a quarter of an hour.

"*She* consents," he cried. "She intrusts her daughter to me for one year. Oh! It was not easy, by any means. She was furious at not finding me at the rendezvous, and was very rude and ugly to Mlle. Vallier; but the brave girl stood her ground, and brought her to terms at last. Do I know how she did it? That's of no consequence; but we shall have the details to-morrow: Aldine will write; she was in a hurry to get home, and seemed nervous and fatigued. Let us give her time to breathe. I am going to reflect about my journey, now that it's all settled."

I had to prove to him that the first thing to be done was to get some money, inasmuch as Mlle. Jeanne could not go to Switzerland on foot, with a bag on her back. He is so accustomed to do without everything, that what I said disturbed him. It is repugnant to him to accept the smallest advance from his daughter, while, in order to have the rents of Magneval sent to him, he must sign a Power of Attorney, and so make his name known. Seeing that he was greatly troubled, I was glad to be able to remove his anxiety by offering him five hundred francs, and telling him that he could send his Power to me from

Lyons or Geneva; I can then make the necessary arrangements with his agent. If I have to go into Champagne for this purpose, I will do so with pleasure, and I even hope that it may be necessary; for a short journey on foot will do me no harm, and I shall be terribly lonely in my solitude when my hermit goes.

XXXI.

From Aldine Vallier to M. Sylvestre.

La Tilleraie, 24 June.

DEAR and worthy friend: You told me that you wished to have a talk with me before leaving. When you will; but to-day, and first of all, let us talk of Jeanne. You want me to relate in detail my interview with her mother, and, with this purpose, I write.

I was somewhat disturbed by her anger, at first, when I told her that you would not see her, and that I had deceived her in appointing a meeting for you. She insisted that she would not listen to me unless I went to her house. My refusal exasperated her, but I succeeded in soothing and calming her. Then she told me that she knew what your projects were, that Jeanne had confided them to her, and that she would make no objection, if I would accompany her daughter. I had to say that this was impossible, that I was poor, that I could not leave Zoe, that I had to earn my living and hers, and that you were not rich enough to pay a governess. Then came that sad question of money: she offered me a considerable salary, and, in spite of the pains I took not to refuse too abruptly and not to give a reason for my refusal, she understood that the idea of owing anything to her was as obnoxious to me as it was to you. Then she inveighed against our false delicacy, our intolerance and our im-

placable prejudice. Everything she said in this connection seemed to me very curious: she displayed as much passion, eloquence and indignation, as if she were defending a just cause against harsh and cruel enemies. She declaimed most bitterly against modesty and womanly pride, depreciating everything that she felt to be above her; and, finally, she did not spare me any more than any one else, but gave me to understand that I was trying to please M. Nuñez. This made me angry, I confess, but she did not see it, and my apparent calmness compelled her to recover herself, or, at least, to pretend to. Then she tried the part of a repentant sinner; but she displeased me still more in this character, and her fictitious tears did not move me. At last, after many words, and useless displays of emotion, she yielded, not to what she calls your obstinacy and your singularity, but to a consideration which you do not imagine, and of which I must now speak.

I must inform you, my friend, that Jeanne loves M. Pierre, or thinks she does. I do not believe that it is anything serious, however; she is such a child! Really, in experience and reflection, Jeanne is not a day over fifteen. She yields to first impressions with astonishing facility, and at once gives the name of passion to her caprices. Fortunately, the smallest trifle, a dress, a fan, a belt, occupies her quite as much as a project of marriage. When she is with you, she will certainly lay her heart open to you, and you can then judge if you will approve her choice or dissuade her from it. I believe I know your opinion beforehand: you love and esteem M. Pierre, but you think him too positive for his years, and I am inclined to agree with you. I am afraid that he may not be at all disposed to love Jeanne as he must love her in order to forget her mother; but there is a little Mme. Duport

here, who, with what purpose I cannot tell, plays upon Jeanne's imagination, and makes her believe that M. Pierre is in love with her. Please Heaven it may be so, for that excellent young man lacks nothing but a little enthusiasm and faith. Certainly he is worthy of belonging to you, and, on the day when he shall be sufficiently in love with Jeanne to assume the responsibility of her future life, we can dismiss all anxiety respecting her. I am doing my best to make him appreciate Jeanne's charming character, her goodness, her generous confidence and her touching simplicity.

Does Mme. Irène really believe that Jeanne's love is serious? She detests M. Pierre, and yet strongly desires him for a son-in-law. Can it be that she seeks vengeance for his previous refusal of her daughter? She persuades herself that he has become attached to Jeanne since he has known her better, and that he will go to Switzerland after you, now that he has found resources in his talents. After all, it is by no means impossible, and I felt obliged not only to leave this hope to Mme. Irène, but also to exaggerate its probability a little. The important point was to make her consent to surrender Jeanne to you for a year, and that is settled. You can fix the time of departure. Mme. Irène will be supposed to be taking her daughter to Italy, but she will only go to Lyons, where you will be waiting to receive her.

The question of how long Jeanne is to stay with you still remains: if you can get her married within the year, she is yours for life, of course, and, as her wishes are paramount with her mother, she will marry the man she loves, if he love her. If M. Pierre do not declare himself, I believe that she will quickly give him up and forget him without an effort. Perhaps you may consider it desirable to invite him to join you in your journey, for

I do not pretend to any certainty in my supposition that Mme. Duport is mistaken, and that Jeanne deceives herself. These matters are very delicate, and I cannot treat of them except with great reserve and discretion.

To-morrow I will go to the meeting which M. Pierre has arranged with me for you, but I was not willing to let you remain twenty-four hours in ignorance of what is taking place in Jeanne's heart and her mother's thoughts.

Yours, entirely and devotedly,

ALDINE VALLIER.

XXXII.

FROM PIERRE TO PHILIPPE.

L'ESCABEAU, 25 June.

MY friend Diamant, who has been holding an important conference this morning with Gédéon on the subject of rejuvenating the latter's forty summers, stopped to see me on his return from La Tilleraie. He thinks that Mlle. Vallier has listened to her little Zoe's sage advice, and that her marriage with the owner of the chateau is about decided. The servants consider the thing settled, and the old aunts speak of it freely, without making the slightest objection. As she is to have an explanation with M. Sylvestre to-day, and as he has overcome his prejudices respecting the aspirant, I suppose that Gédéon will come this evening or to-morrow to make me the confidant of his happiness, unless he is afraid of afflicting me, for it is certain that he does fear me a little. He is quite wrong, for I am not sufficiently Mlle. Vallier's friend to induce her to consult me, and, if she should do so, I could only reply that it is first of all necessary to be in harmony with one's self. She is reasonable and practical. Riches are a great happiness to those who love them. The opportunity is a splendid one. Gédéon has, moreover, the merit of being in love. Why should she hesitate?

XXXIV.

From Pierre to Philippe.

L'Escabeau, 28 June.

SOMETHING very extraordinary is going on here around me, and perhaps about me, and I have great need of your clear head and sound advice.

I was on my way to dine at La Tilleraie to-day — Gédéon wrote me a note, upbraiding me for my non-appearance and my unsociability. I am so much afraid of appearing sulky and envious, that, notwithstanding my desire to keep quietly at work, I started at once, in order to show the face of a man in full possession of all his peace of heart and clearness of intellect. I had just entered the wood, which I cross diagonally, because it is the shortest way to reach the terrace of La Tilleraie, when I found myself face to face with Mlle. Jeanne. Surprised at meeting her alone in that little desert, I told her that she did wrong in walking about in that manner.

"Allons donc," she replied, quite pertly and abruptly. "Isn't the country safe, and doesn't my friend Aldine go and come alone at any hour?"

"At any hour? No."

"Well! Isn't it broad daylight?"

"Mlle. Vallier's poverty has hitherto been an excuse for her independence."

"I have the same excuse now."

"What do you mean? Has your mother lost her property?"

"Yes, she has. Her banker has failed, and she has nothing left."

I was on the point of congratulating Mlle. Jeanne, but I refrained.

"You may suppose," she resumed, "that this is not the time to travel; I must think of economizing, perhaps of working. I have just been to see my grandfather, and explained the matter to him; he approves of what I have done, and is pleased with me. Now will you give me your arm to go back to La Tilleraie? You are expected there, I know."

"I am not going yet, mademoiselle, it is too early."

"Which means that you do not wish to go with me."

"I do not wish to compromise you, and am astonished that you oblige me to say so."

"Pardon! I didn't think I could be so easily compromised. Have you never escorted Mlle. Vallier on her visits to the hermitage?"

"Never, mademoiselle. I should not have offered to, and she would not have permitted me."

"Then—I thank you for your refusal. Au revoir, M. Pierre."

I reached La Tilleraie an hour after her. In the evening Gédéon took me aside.

"You know," he said, "that Mlle. Irène is ruined?"

"Is it true?"

"Do you doubt it? Well! You are right, and I will not deceive you: there is not one word of truth in it. The banker who failed had little or no money of hers."

"Why does she spread such a report?"

"To remove the scruples of the man who may marry her daughter."

"Then it's a trap laid beforehand, for the simple lover who shall let himself be taken?"

"Perhaps! But Mlle. Jeanne will spring it."

"How so?"

"She will refuse every kind of dowry."

"I don't understand."

"Jeanne knows all: a chambermaid enlightened her as to the real fact, and she has left her mother. Oh! with all her childish manner, she's a very energetic girl. It appears that she annihilated poor Irène. Rebecca was present at a regular melodramatic scene."

"Well! Mlle. Jeanne did wrong."

"You think so?"

"Yes. In melodramas, the interesting daughter adores her mother, under whatever circumstances. It's classical, and it's not probable, but it's generous. I should have preferred to have had Mlle. Jeanne somewhat less matter of fact."

"Ah! What do you know about it? Perhaps the little one is in love with somebody. It is not her fault if her mother's past life prove an obstacle. Innocence naturally revolts against vice when it makes it pay the penalty of its shame."

"Innocence ought not to comprehend so readily what vice and shame are."

"Innocence guesses what it does not comprehend. Besides, Irène herself enlightened her daughter, for she lost her head in her anger and vexation, and declaimed in every tone, sometimes forgetting herself so much as to curse modest women — an old trick of her trade — and sometimes playing the Magdalen at the feet of Christ — another craft of the devil turned hermit; so much that the little one, who had probably felt before that there was

some ugly secret, saw clearly enough at last to want to go back to the convent."

"That's what she ought to have done, without saying a word about it; and, since she is pious, she ought to turn nun, and give her dowry to the community. The Church is not proud; she never asks where money comes from when it is brought to her."

"And the Church is right, my dear. Money itself is innocent and good, like everything that man abuses. Is it possible, by chance, that you hold any such Middle-age notions? In those days, when a man had made a compact with the devil, they tore down his house and sowed his land with salt to make it barren. It was stupid enough to destroy a habitation which could do no harm, and might serve to shelter some poor family; but as to the soil — supposing that it could be made barren with salt — the idea of destroying the instrument of man's labor, the inalienable property of future generations, the gift of God, in fine, 'tis just simply a crime, and I cannot understand how a fellow of good sense, like you — of eminently social and practical good sense — can still be in a state to believe that the earth can be cursed, or money dirty."

"Then you would marry Mlle. Jeanne yourself, with her mother's fortune?"

"With it or without it, if I loved her, certainly."

"You could do it in either case, as you are ten times as rich as she; but if you were poor?"

"In that case I would found a charitable institution with my wife's dowry, and nobody could say a word."

"Mlle. Jeanne is more scrupulous, it seems, since she renounces her inheritance; unless that be a trick also."

"No, that's no trick; it's a piece of sentimental folly. It appears that there's a little fief of Magneval in Champagne, and a sort of grandfather in Switzerland or Italy,

who will settle the property on her at once; so that she is by no means poor."

"Ah! Then the talk about the convent was merely a farce?"

"No, it was only the first impulse. But how severe you are with that charming girl! For she is charming through it all, I assure you — very decided and very resigned. Besides, my cousin Rebecca, who is a woman of brains, has arranged everything for the best. She takes Jeanne with her, and promises to see to her marriage; my sisters, also, offer to act as aunts; I naturally become her uncle, and have invited her to stay at my house for the summer with Mme. Duport, whose husband is obliged to go to Germany on business. Poor Irène, to cover up the whole transaction, pretends to pursue her banker to England, where she will probably remain. Thus everything is arranged in the best manner, and, if you should fall in love with my beautiful ward, I should say: 'Why not, my dear?' A thousand crowns income in Champagne, and a charming woman to boot, do not make an interested marriage, and, in your circumstances, it would not be a foolish one. We'll talk of this again, some day, if you please."

"Let us talk of it at once, my dear friend."

"Ah! Then you bite? That's good, and I'm very glad."

"You're a little too fast. I have no wish to marry, and it is not likely that I shall ever sacrifice my independence to any woman."

"So much the worse for you! You will never know what love is, for we love only virtuous women, my dear, and are never loved except by them. Now the virtuous women demand marriage, and it is their due."

Gédéon was right; he is the practical man, uttering

with conviction those every-day truths which all our paradoxes cannot alter. I saw that he had not taken my reply as serious, and I declared to him that I should never marry for love as he understood it.

"So you think I am advocating love-marriages? That's according to what you mean by love. If it be a foolish passion, I'm against all such fancies; but if you mean a strong and solid friendship, the delight of the senses, the satisfaction of heart and mind, I tell you that everything which is not this is nothing but libertinage, delirium and vanity. Therefore, every reasonable man ought to marry; that is, bind himself for life to a pure and virtuous woman. There are some who do not require marriage; but they are wrong. That is a generosity which we almost always abuse, and, as such unions have all the inconveniences of marriage without its advantages, it is much more simple to have a legal sanction for one's affection, and to get rid of the evil chances of caprice. That is the opinion of your hermit, whom I went to see yesterday, and who, by the way, is a charming man. I consulted him on the choice of a husband for my ward Jeanne, and what he said about marriage gave me the desire to be married myself."

"Why do you try to deceive me, my dear friend? It was not the hermit who gave you that idea; you have had it ever since Mlle. Vallier went to live at your place."

"Did she tell you?"

"The hermit told me."

"Well — What do you say to it?"

"That you have made a very good choice — Well! Why do you look at me so peculiarly?"

"Because — because I can't explain to myself why you

are not a little in love with her. Everybody who knows her is attracted by her."

"Well! For my part, I cannot comprehend how I could be *a little* in love with her. She deserves more than that, and, if I were accessible to the passion, she would probably be its object; but, as my reason and my poverty — that is, my conscience — forbid me to dream of marrying, I do not permit myself to think even a little of her. I am wise enough and strong enough not to think of her at all."

"That is said like a man of heart and a man of honor. Then you can easily think of some one else."

"You stick to that, I see. I thank you for your solicitude, but you can dispense with it. I do not love Mlle. Jeanne, and it is not necessary that I should love her in order that you may be the happiest man in the world."

"You think that I am jealous?"

"Who knows? Tell me that you are not."

"I should tell you a lie. I am jealous of everybody, but I esteem you too much not to wish to be reassured respecting you, and my gratitude — "

"Oh! my dear friend!" I cried, rather irritated. "Do not speak of that! I do not want your friendship, if it be at the cost of a pretended sacrifice. Such a sacrifice would be beyond my power, and I swear to you that I would not make it for anybody. A man ought to sacrifice his love for the happiness of the person he loves, but he cannot sacrifice it for another man. Therefore I make no sacrifice for you. I do not love anybody. Do not think of thanking me, unless you wish to offend me mortally."

"You are right," replied Gédéon, impetuously seizing

my hand. "You have given me a lesson which I comprehend, and which I will not again deserve."

During the evening, Mme. Duport also took me aside. Less sincere, and, consequently, less skilful than her cousin Gédéon, she let me see clearly, in spite of all her craft, that she expected to make me marry Jeanne. It is, I believe, a sort of vengeance for my refusal of herself. She would like to place me in opposition to my principles, and, as this woman has none of her own, she imagines that I will come round some day, and, after having ostentatiously refused Jeanne's dowry, will ultimately take quiet possession of her inheritance. I thanked her, ironically, for her delightful opinion of me, and she got herself out of the scrape by a joke. She has a sarcastic and a ready wit, which palliates to the world her want of judgment; but I do not forgive her, and, if Jeanne were not on the whole an honest creature, I would avenge myself on them all by bantering her.

I'm provoked with her, too, stupid little girl! It is she who makes all this trouble for me. Would you believe that she imagines me to be in love with her, because, in the first place, Rebecca does her best to persuade her of it, and, in the second, because I one day said to her grandfather that, if he went into Switzerland, I might join him there. I was dissatisfied here; you know why. Now that I have compelled Gédéon to be sincere with me, and have preserved my dignity as regards him, I am very calm, and do not see why I should not finish my work at L'Escabeau. I should not find the same favorable conditions for concentration anywhere else, and shutting myself up here quietly is the best answer I can give to prove to Mlle. Jeanne that she has not set my brain on fire.

XXXV.

Mlle. Vallier to M. Sylvestre.

La Tilleraie, 4 July.

MY friend: I have reflected upon all you said to me, and here is my answer; it is the same I gave you verbally: I do not love M. Nuñez. Everything is included in that, you know. I look upon him as an honorable and excellent man; he is generous, sociable and devoted; the regard he manifests towards me impresses me in his favor, and his position is certainly such as to honor me; but, after all, you see, there is an ideal. Have I an ideal? I, who know so few people, and have almost always lived alone? No! I could not say what the man I might love would be; I only know that M. Nuñez is not that man. I reflect, I reason with myself, but all to no purpose. In the first place, I don't like Jews. Do not think that I have any old-time prejudice against them. I don't like the English any better, and I cannot tell the reason why. Perhaps such practical people are too much like myself, for I have always been compelled to be practical beyond my age, and I cannot say that it has made me happy. If I could be so, it would certainly be in the society of poetical and romantic persons, such as I myself am in a certain mysterious region of my thought; but it is not everybody that can go to Corinth. I am fastened to the earthy earth; I walk upon it without fatigue,

and without pretending to have been made for anything better. My Corinth is in a corner of my brain, and when I have finished my day's material work, I wander in dream through the enchanted city. I could not tell you whether it is built of gold or of stone; whether its inhabitants are dark or light; but nobody works there, nobody amasses wealth, everybody enjoys the present, and finds delight in contemplating the beautiful; if any one thinks of the future, it is not with reference to the figure one will cut, but to the merit one will have attained. Now there is nothing Corinthian in this excellent Nuñez family. They are artists after their fashion, I grant you; but it is at their own hours, and they pass from calculations to enthusiasm with a facility which confounds me. I cannot conform to their alternations without secret suffering, and this suffering makes me feel that I am other than they — not better, not so good and wise, perhaps — but more myself, more French, that is, more jealous of my individuality, and more willing to incur the chances of the unforeseen. For instance, I want to be free to weep under the charm of music, or to be completely insensible to it, if my fancy carry me elsewhere. In short, I am a little crazy, perhaps, and I want to have the right to be so. This can do no harm, if nobody perceives it or even suspects it.

Perhaps this is the result of having been crushed in my youth by a tyranny, the stupor and terror of which I still feel sometimes. Thus the idea of marriage also terrifies me, and, if I could be allowed to remain as I am, a girl about whom nobody need care, and who requires no outward help to maintain her dignity, I should esteem myself well satisfied with my lot, and should never think of the morrow.

But now people want to change that lot! Why should

they, since I do not complain of it? They pretend that I ought to be rich. What right have I to that, and why, moreover, should I accept the terrible cares attached to great responsibility? Finally, they pretend to make me happy, as if happiness were something that can be guaranteed to us before a notary. I have no need of what is offered to me. Luxury has been odious to me ever since I was compelled to wear the sapphires and rubies of slavery on my childish arms, in spite of myself. This great mansion, painted and gilt all over, has no attraction for me. It is like a rich and hospitable hotel, which belongs to all the guests, and the possession of which gives no pleasure to him who defrays the expense. The pictures, statues and vases remind me of my poor father's bric-a-brac collection. I was much more at home at L'Escabeau.

And then, you see, there are too many duties attached to the situation. There are two young children to bring up, two old sisters to take care of, a numerous family, an immense concourse of relations, friends, employees, associates, and co-religionists; a world, in fine, to understand or to divine, to restrain or to satisfy, in order that M. Nuñez' important and active life be not hampered in any way, but remain as he wishes. Nothing pleases me in the constitution of this commonwealth. Independent as I now am, I can withdraw at any moment, if I find that I can no longer play my part in the concert fittingly; but how would it be if I were the leader of the orchestra? Ah! Mon Dieu! I should certainly lose my head, and, if I failed in the smallest obligation which the situation imposes, I should have no excuse; I could only say to myself: "Tu l'as voulu, Georges Dandin."

All this, however, would seem as nothing to me, if I loved M. Nuñez. I do not know what love is; but, in

the idea which I have formed of it, it is one of the embodiments of divine faith, of that faith which removes mountains. When I look at M. Nuñez' intelligent and handsome face, I do not ask myself if it pleases me, if I would prefer to have it more or less young, with eyes of another color, or nose of another form. No, I believe love to be something more mysterious than that, and the vague notion I have of it is such that I do not stop at the examination of the external person. His character is certainly not repugnant to me, but when I close my eyes and see myself as Madame Nuñez — rich, magnificently arrayed, presiding over that opulence which is M. Nuñez' work — I feel myself ugly, ridiculous, sad, ennuyée, and then I say to myself, with conviction: "I belong to a sphere, and, consequently, to a man whom I do not love; he must necessarily be hateful to me, because everything he has made is hateful — even the fountains in his garden."

Then I open my eyes, I look at myself, I breathe again, and I say, "No! I am not Madame Nuñez, I am my own self, free, young and strong. The future belongs to me, therefore the present is good. Zoe is cured; the greatest anxiety of my life is removed. I owe that to M. Nuñez; I am grateful, devoted, attached to his children; those children are very nice, and they are not mine. I conscientiously give them such good instruction as I am expected to give, and, if they do not profit by it, they have a family to correct and punish them. I take a great deal of pains with them: this fatigues me, but nothing more; it can never be anything more, and, if I ever have children of my own, they only will awaken that mate[illegible] feeling which is their due."

But you, my friend, have urged me to take still [illegible] time for reflection, before discouraging M. Nuñe[illegible] pletely. You said a great deal that was [illegible]

Yes; it is true that the idea of some day becoming a mother makes my heart beat violently, and that, if I had not this instinct, I should not be a woman. It is also true that, in a few years, I shall possibly be frightened at the isolation of my life, and that the need of loving, long repressed by reason, or stifled by the absorption of daily toil, may be felt by me with a force which I cannot now foresee. Then, it is also possible that, under the influence of too strong a feeling, I may make a precipitate choice, much less good than that which I could now make. I should thus be allowing an opportunity, which in certain respects will probably be unparalleled in my life, to escape; and, as I cannot logically pretend to a rich marriage, if I should bring up a family, it would be with all the anxieties, all the fatigues, all the perils of poverty.

Alas! Yes! I know that it must be so: if I listen to my instincts, if I consult my tastes, my lot would be below mediocrity, and my family would only add to the number of the austere poor, or of the rejected aspirants in the world, already so full of concealed poverty and disappointed ambition. With this danger in view, the love of a true-hearted man would possibly appear to me an act of generosity which I might not dare to accept, and perhaps I should refuse to marry, for fear of injuring another. To live alone, or to live in suffering and anxiety, is probably to be my fate.

M. Nuñez, to whom I have frankly said everything that I now say to you, is not wanting in arguments to persuade me to his views; arguments which I do not know how to answer. He has great persistency, and I cannot be offended, since, in reality, if it be one way of paying his court to me, it does not in any manner resemble an attempt to beguile. He does not try to excite my imagination, or to move my feelings by any romantic or

dramatic phrases. He reasons, he pleads, he says the wisest possible things to convince me, and I sometimes ask myself if I be not really crazy to expect any other than a common-sense solution; but, a moment after, I recover possession of my unknown ideal, and the chimera of happiness, probably never to be realized, lulls me like rippling water, and prevents me from listening to and comprehending M. Nuñez' conjugal theory.

Finally, in spite of my impatience to have the matter decided, I have been compelled to consent to *reflect* for three months more, before giving him an absolute refusal. He promises not to question me and not to lecture me any more until the end of this trial. He imposes silence on himself, and swears to me that he will not be troubled, or importunate, or provoked. He combats the fear I have of acting like a coquette who is trying to make herself expected and desired, by assuring me that he entertains no passion for me in the meaning given to that word. His passion, he says, is his will, and he asserts that he is strong enough to overcome any feeling of impatience or irritation. Ought I to trust these promises, which assume the possession of great energy of character, and of a reason superior to all emotion? I am afraid of appearing vain and ridiculous if I doubt his power over himself, for, in reality, I am not very pretty, nor brilliant enough to turn the head of a man so self-reliant in the management of his affairs. I threatened, however, to leave his house at once and go far away, in case he broke his oath. He only laughed at this, and said that a poor girl could not go very far, and that a rich man could discover her in two days, even if she were hidden in a cave. This is a threat to pursue and importune me; but I do not fear him in the least, which is a proof that I do not love him.

That is quite enough about myself: now let us talk

about Jeanne. She is installed here with Mme. Duport, who is not exactly the adoptive mother I would have chosen for her; but the disadvantages will not be so great as I feared at first. The beautiful Rebecca is very worldly, and does not like the country except on those days when Paris comes out to meet her there. Therefore, as no one can make a festival of every day in the week, and as, underneath the brilliant life which is led here, there is strict regularity of occupation, and a great deal of order, she so arranges, in the absence of her husband, as to run from one *villegiatura* to another with her mother-in-law, who feels the same need of noise and change that she does. Thus she will not be here except on the not numerous days of concert or assembly, and Jeanne has refused to accompany her on her jaunts. The child is pleased here, though somewhat disappointed of late. M. Pierre has not shown himself for some days past, and talks of being more chary of his visits. He is at work, and he is right.

I believe that, if he does love Jeanne, he will not marry her before being certain of well-assured resources, and a certain fertility of talent; but does he love her? She insists that she is sure of it, because he scolded her roundly one day when he met her alone in the wood. Could not you ascertain if the dear child does not deceive herself? It is difficult for me to try to dissuade her, and yet, ought she to cherish a dangerous illusion? I submit the problem to you, and leave you: I hear the children coming; it is seven o'clock in the morning.

Yours, very tenderly and respectfully,

ALDINE.

XXXVI.

From Philippe to Pierre.

Volvic, 6 July.

MY dear child: I do not at all like what is "going on around you." Neither do I like Mlle. Vallier any longer, since she has shown herself so worldly; but I fear that you will seriously regret her, and I fear, also, that they will succeed in making you fall in love with Jeanne — wrongheadedly in love, out of spite or caprice — and that, after having been enticed into some compromising folly, you will be forced to marry the daughter of the courtesan. This is exactly what must not be. You appear to have penetrated Rebecca's design; but guessing it is not defeating it. For my part, I have no faith in the grand character of that Jeanne, who so readily and coolly throws off her mother, but who may not be so willing to throw up an income of a hundred thousand francs to please her grandfather and you, on the day when you shall have committed the folly (God preserve you from it!) of compromising yourself with her. I know very well that what M. Gédéon suggests can be done, that Lais's gold talents can be made useful to the poor; but, supposing her daughter to consent, what would be the sequence of such a sacrifice? An immense amount of virtue will be required to induce her to give up her rose-colored dresses, and all their pleasing accompaniments

when she is one of the beauties of Paris, bred in luxury, and accustomed to do nothing. Oh! I do wish you were farther from La Tilleraie, and nearer to me.

Say and do what you will, friend Pierre, love is the great promoter of all human follies, and this is simply natural: it is the great pursuit of life, the great need, the great aspiration of our whole existence. We risk everything in order to secure it, and many are wounded or killed in the attempt. You have tried to defend yourself from it too long, and have thus imprudently increased the danger. It is useless to tell us physicians, who constantly find science fail before the intellectual and physical ravages of the passions, that man's love for woman is an unreal thing, the product of mysticism, or chivalry, or fashion, or literature. Ta, ta, ta! We know better. In all time there have been violent demonstrations of instinct or of will for such or such an object, and woman is the principal. If man could be restored to a state of nature by saying to him: "Gratify your senses; the universe invites you, and your freedom shall have no limits but those of your energy," the highest animal of creation would not show himself inferior to other animals: he would select his companion, would guard her jealously, would watch over her and share with her the cares of their family. Civilization has made no change in that respect. You may poetize or unreasonably materialize this attraction, it will always be absolute, because it is natural — that is, divinely decreed.

But let us choose well. The more intelligent we are, the better should we know how to select our companion, and to found the association on the basis of a true sympathy. The hermit of Grez is right: whoever deceives himself is wrong in deceiving himself, and has no right to complain. There is time enough yet, my dear reas-

oner. Reason wisely, and do not, as a consequence of denying the power of woman, find yourself some day obliged to submit to it in its most fallacious and disastrous phase.

So you are not willing to come and gather strength in the air of our mountains? Ah! You are very wrong. My mother calls you an ingrate, and I am vexed that I cannot go and fix myself at your side as the Ulysses or the Mentor of L'Escabeau. You would wish me at the devil, I know, but I would not let you be coquetting round at La Tilleraie with those beautiful birds whose flight is not the same as your own.

XXXVII.

From Pierre to Philippe.

L'Escabeau, 15 July.

DO not think that I disregard your foresight and your warnings; on the contrary, I read your letters over and over again: they embody a theory of good sense, which I am very far from despising. Its peculiarity is that it starts from the ideal of which you make a physiological law, a necessity of our organization, and you combat unconditionally any revolt against real love as you understand it. Perhaps you are right in considering it an exclusive and sovereign feeling, a kind of natural religion, which no one can transgress without being brought to shame and suffering. Gédéon seems to be under the influence of that true feeling, for he surrounds Mlle. Vallier with a mute and fervent adoration; and, as she is doubtless touched by it, he will have selected and obtained the companion best fitted for him, while I shall have the humiliation of being the plaything of the caprice of Mlle. Jeanne, who is not fitted for me under any serious aspect.

You have defined the situation exactly: they do want to make me fall in love with that young girl, and there is a veritable conspiracy around us, in which Gédéon and his sisters, Mlle. Vallier, Rebecca, and even the hermit himself are engaged. Yes, the candid and upright M.

Sylvestre thought that he could artfully hint to me, but did in reality tell me quite clearly, that he should be very happy to give me Magneval and his granddaughter, and that a heart so generous and noble as mine ought to find its duty and its joy in rehabilitating the future of that child. While he was thus discoursing to me in axioms of perfect transparency, Mlle. Jeanne arrived at the hermitage, as if by chance. At first she gayly and insolently played the surprised, but she soon blushed before my gaze, and her eyes filled with tears. There was danger then, and you foresaw it. One can fall in love without loving, and I experienced a great disturbance on seeing that my mocking and malicious smile pierced her timid, yet presumptuous heart as with a bitter shaft. Yes, she is seductive, that girl with the tawny locks! She had on some kind of head-dress of scarlet ribbon, which greatly enhanced the brilliancy of that natural glory. She stood in a ray of sunlight, and seemed to have descended from the luminary itself to enter like a conquering apparition into the hermit's gloomy retreat. The angel of the annunciation could not have been more luminous or more dazzling when he brought ecstacy into the house of the carpenter. And I, when I saw the confusion of alarmed modesty on the cheeks of the young girl follow this triumphant entrance of the angel, I became infatuated, and was almost ready to say to the hermit: "Give us your blessing."

But I resisted the madness, and retired, after exchanging a few unmeaning words with them. Still, I was even weaker when I found myself alone in the wood. My heart fluttered and beat in my breast, the blood tingled my ears, and I imagined that I continued to hea fresh, perhaps rather forced, but yet, in any case, tile laugh of that beautiful girl, who has no heart

conscience; for I swear to you that I do not love her, and I judge her even more severely than you do. She is either playing a part in order to get married, or she neither loves nor pities her mother; while I know that the latter, for the first time in her life, perhaps, has experienced a real affliction, and they do say that she was in utter despair. It was a deserved punishment; but I, myself, have been to visit my uncle, and I saw how sad he was; I was disarmed, and embraced him with an affection which made me feel that it is not for us to punish our parents, and that, were they tenfold unjust, misled, or culpable, we are hateful when we voluntarily make them suffer.

Then Jeanne's beautiful laugh, which was ringing in my brain, grew harsh and discordant to me. I felt myself unequal to the cruel task of separating her from the woman who had borne her in her bosom, and of approving ingratitude and cruelty. No! If I were Jeanne's husband, I should have pity on her mother, and I could not drive her from my door when she came to beg for a look of her daughter; for it has never entered into the mind of that unfortunate, depraved as she is, to corrupt her child; on the contrary, she sacrifices herself, she obliterates herself, she goes away. I should forgive her, and, as perversity is incorrigible in such souls, as maternal love does not purify them, whatever romancers may imagine, Irène would say to Rebecca the next day: "Ah! I was sure that he wouldn't be very morose with my hundred thousand francs income."

Let who will take charge of Jeanne! Her destiny is a problem which I cannot undertake to settle. Perhaps love would give me courage to brave all suspicions; but what I feel for her is not love; it is another kind of

hallucination, and I should be very contemptible if I could not overcome it.

And yet there is danger still, as you said. Imagine my weakness when I tell you that, after resolving to go and shut myself up at home, I waited in the wood to meet her. I wanted to see her pass without her seeing me, and, this time, as an old servant from La Tilleraie was with her, I had no tête-à-tête to fear. I waited five hours, and I waited in vain, for she had taken another path. Then I experienced an extraordinary impatience, a necessity, to see her again, and I ran to La Tilleraie, whither I had sworn to myself not to return within a fortnight, and, instead of going home to work, I spent the whole evening there.

When I arrived, Jeanne was in the garden, sitting on a bench with Mlle. Vallier. She appeared tired or depressed; but, on seeing me, she became animated, and, though I was still at some distance, I heard a poorly-suppressed cry of joy or triumph, and saw a gesture of Mlle. Vallier, which seemed to say, "Restrain yourself."

I saluted them quite naturally, and, a moment after, Mlle. Vallier asked me if I should stay to dinner.

"Yes, if your question be an invitation."

She appeared surprised, and said: "Do you take me for the mistress of the house?"

Jeanne cried foolishly: "If you are not yet, you will be soon."

Aldine turned very pale, made a deprecatory movement, rose, and, without replying, went towards her pavilion, leaving me, either intentionally or thoughtlessly, alone with Jeanne.

I asked the latter why her friend appeared displeased at hearing the announcement of her intended marriage.

"Because she's so high-spirited and proud. She im-

agines that she will be accused of ambitious motives, but if there be wicked tongues that calumniate her, we will defend her, will we not?"

"You will defend her, as you know her feelings. I do not."

"Really? Hasn't she confided to you, her friend, that she loves M. Nuñez sincerely, for himself alone?"

"I have not taken the liberty to ask her; but, since she has told you, and you repeat it to me, I cannot doubt it."

"She has never told me, but I can see it clearly enough; and, if you don't see it, it's because you're blind."

"I do not seek to be clear-sighted; that kind of curiosity is not the privilege of our sex."

"That's an epigram."

"No! It is merely a remark."

"Call it a reproach. You think that I'm curious?"

"If I had studied you sufficiently to be authorized to reprove you, it is I who would deserve to be accused of indiscreet curiosity and bad taste."

"In other words, you have never done me the honor to take an interest in me? I had flattered myself to the contrary. The hermit's daughter, and Aldine's friend, had some right to your sympathy!"

"That is possible; but what would you do with my sympathy?"

"You would give me good advice. You have given me some already."

"You did not follow it."

"I went beyond it. I left —"

"Oh! Do not pride yourself on that; nobody asked you to leave your mother in that manner."

"Then you blame me, do you?"

"Do you wish me to tell you so?"

"Yes; I should like to know what you think of me."

"Well! I do blame you."

"You believe that I do not love my mother?"

"I do believe so."

"You say that to me in such a tone — Then you want to make me hate her?"

She said this quite violently, and accompanied it with a look so strange, so passionate, or so haughty, that I gazed at her in my turn with astonishment, and asked myself: Is it love she feels for me? or is it aversion? And if it were love, should I be overcome? We were interrupted, and I ought to have gone away after half an hour's delay, for I was all in a tremor. Why did I stay? She was so beautiful that evening, with her dishevelled hair, which she had not taken the trouble to smooth on entering, with her ardent eyes, her fascinating mouth full of caressing or bitter words! There is a sphynx in that spoiled child's head. Mlle. Vallier did not appear again. She sent word that she had letters to write. We were alone with Gédéon, who seemed uneasy at her absence, and read the papers all the evening as if he were thinking of something else. His sisters had stopped a little while to laugh at the eccentricities of Jeanne, who one moment undertook to banter or to flatter me, and the next sat down at the piano, and hammered away upon it furiously. One of those respectable demoiselles fell asleep in spite of the noise, while the other, who is more nervous, exclaimed that Jeanne's playing was excruciating, and went off. I confess that my nerves, also, were in a very disturbed state, and that, finding myself alone with her for a while, I turned towards the piano with the intention of shutting it down upon her fingers. If I had yielded to that movement of impatience, I

been lost. She meant to provoke it: she wanted to make me angry, perhaps brutal, in order that she might get vexed in her turn, and burst into tears, or something else. There was a fever of love, or a rage of coquetry, in all her words, in all her actions. Oh, vanity! I was nearly caught, but, fortunately, I had a better inspiration, and pretended to go to sleep, like Mlle. Noemi Nuñez. My eyes being turned towards the window, I retained *sang froid* enough to watch Gédéon, who was seated outside; I saw him rise, go toward the pavilion, come back, return and come back again. It was simply a turn, uneasy and agitated, perhaps, but without intention of paying a visit to his betrothed, whose smallest wish he seems blindly to respect. Why should she make him suffer? Is she a coquette, too? I am afraid that women are good for nothing.

When he came in, I pretended to wake up, and he could not help laughing, for his whimsical ward was still doing her best to break the piano. He pulled her from it without ceremony, and Jeanne allowed herself to be seized by the hands, the arms, and even by the waist, while she shouted with laughter. The sisters came in also, and proposed some game of cards in which the players pretend to quarrel. Not understanding it, I begged to be allowed to look on. They squabbled together very amicably, and said many insulting words with smiling faces. I watched Jeanne. She is a coquette in grain, nothing more, and I was a fool to think myself the object of a serious attack. She took more pains to tease, attract, and engross Gédéon in the course of the evening than she had done with me, and I retired quite calm. You see where I am: with two or three more experiences of this kind, the danger will have passed. Hers is a beauty which acts upon the senses only. She

does not know it, and doubtless tries to awaken a more serious emotion; but, do what she can, her charm does not reach the soul. She will not prevent Gédéon from loving Aldine, or me from thinking Gédéon right.

It is strange, but whenever I think of Mlle. Vallier I feel strong against Jeanne, for there are moments — My dear Philippe, I want to tell you frankly what is going on within me. You have often accused me of walking on little stilts of my own manufacture, and wishing to be a cubit taller than my proper stature. Perhaps this is true, and I am not ashamed of it; I believe that we all do so, and must do so in order to make the most of our insignificance: to wish to elevate one's self is to aspire to what is elevated. It pleased me, I confess, to think that I had profited sufficiently by my studies and my reflections to be able to keep myself beyond the reach of factitious passions and false ideas. That does not make me a fool, but still I may be a weak man, compelled to remain below the level of my ambition. I want to make a clean breast of it: Yes; I do regret that Mlle. Vallier can be nothing to me, and I shall suffer at her marriage with Gédéon. I cannot believe that it is love which I experience for a woman who has never deigned to think of inspiring me with it. I am therefore persuaded that my regret is a wrong feeling, and that I ought to contend against it. It must be a personal jealousy, wounded self-love, vexation at seeing another's merit appreciated where my own has not been. But I have defended myself well: I have not allowed it to be seen; I have not permitted myself to think of it, and have worked quite well in spite of it. I am certain that I shall be able to witness the marriage with dignity and cordiality; I even mean to be present, and to stand by Gédéon's side, if necessary. I wish to remain his friend, and to think and say all possible good of his wi

Once again — though I am, perhaps, the victim of a foolish feeling, I am not therefore a fool, for I mean to subdue that feeling.

In addition to this inward weakness which I am conscious of and resist, I have another cause for over-excitement, in the fact that Jeanne, either from spite, or momentary fancy, or nervous caprice, really wishes to be my wife. In whatever way you look upon it, this is a severe trial for a man twenty-four years old, who has never abused life, and, though I may reason coldly enough about the situation, I am none the less affected by it. Both my work and my sleep have been somewhat disturbed, and I see clearly that, though I may venture upon an intimacy with Mlle. Vallier, I must avoid one with Jeanne. I cannot consider this involuntary emotion a great crime, but I should despise myself sincerely if I sought to persuade myself by sophisms that it would be right to yield to it. No! there will be nothing of the kind; I shall never be convinced that my imagination ought to govern my conscience, and that it is allowable to deceive my heart when I know that my heart is not affected. I shall not permit myself to be drawn into a marriage which is repugnant to me, for I will not pay any attentions to Mlle. Jeanne, and, if I should ever have the misfortune to utter a word of love to her, it would be one that would disgust her with me: it would not be a conventional phrase, that is, a lie, a deceit; I prefer to be rude rather than mean. But do not fear that this will happen: I shall so avoid the chance that it will never occur again.

And then I think of *the other*. As I told you, when her image presents itself to me, that of Jeanne disappears. And yet Jeanne is admirably beautiful, while Aldine is not so; but her charms speak to the mind, her smile goes

direct to the heart, and you feel that, if she did love, she would be loved with love and esteem, which must be the ideal of affection. And why should she not love Gédéon? I cannot tell; I am not a woman. Perhaps he is very attractive to women. Jeanne also coquets with him. Is it with the purpose of piquing me? I should be ashamed if I allowed myself to be caught in such a trap.

Since that evening, that is for four days, I have kept quiet at L'Escabeau. I have not even talked with my hermit, though I have seen him on his way to fish, and we have exchanged friendly salutations at a distance. I do not want to have him say anything more to me about Jeanne: I should be compelled to give him pain, and I hope that he will comprehend my silence. I have almost finished my second article, and am not dissatisfied with it. I work easily, and do not fatigue myself, for I now sleep well, and fall asleep at once after having been awake quite far into the night. Do not feel anxious when there happens to be a considerable interval between my letters; they are long enough and detailed enough to make up for it. I have promised myself, and I promise you, to continue the conscientious and faithful analysis of this phase of my life. It is a study which has nothing very dramatic about it, and will be limited, I believe, to steering as well as I can, but without shipwreck, between two shoals, since the time for reaching what you consider the promised land has not yet come for your friend Pierre. In this navigation I have always a propitious star which I cannot invoke, but the mysterious and salutary influence of which preserves me from the meteor with the blazing hair. Aldine will save me from Jeanne, and she will not know it. Do the stars know that they light and guide us?

XXXVIII.

From Pierre to Philippe.

L'Escabeau, 16 July.

I SAW the hermit passing so near my quarters this morning, that my feeling of the obligations of friendship compelled me to go out and join him. As he was equipped for fishing, and line-fishing requires solitude, or silence, I expected to be let off with a few minutes' chat; but, on seeing me, he laid down his rod, and, seating himself under a willow on the edge of the meadow, he said, with a confiding and friendly air: "Let us have a talk."

The place was charming: the meadow, gently sloping towards the water, was dotted with beautiful spiræas and great purple salicarias, which lifted themselves like princes from among the lowlier grasses. For seats and couches we had some large boulders, heterogeneous masses, which had long ago fallen from the hill, and become buried in the soil, above which their worn and rounded tops project in several places. These beautiful clean dry rocks, scattered among the grass, under a clear shade, invite you to rest, and the hermit knows them well.

"This," said he, "is one of those rich and luxurious boudoirs, which dame Nature places at my disposal. I ought also to be grateful for the generous hospitality of my fellow-men; for not everybody is permitted to enter these fields. In my quality of discreet poor man, I have

permission to go everywhere. People know how much I love the beauty of the plants, how careful I am not to tread down the grass, and how I respect the young shoots of the trees. Is not this an almost regal privilege? All the valley belongs to me; and when the jealous and rather despotic peasant comes towards me with a threatening aspect, he smiles as soon as he recognizes me, and confirms my title by saying: 'Ah! It is you, M. Sylvestre? Then it's all right; it's all right. Go where you please; nobody will say a word to you!' To what potentate do you think Jacques Bonhomme has ever rendered faith and homage so heartily?

"This," he continued, "is one of my favorite retreats. Just see how gracefully and sweetly the stream winds through that slight inequality of the soil. It is he who has washed away that little bank; it was his pleasure, after having glided, quiet and noiseless, through the meadows, to make a little turn here, and to heap up that small bank of sand before resuming his silent and measured march. Everything has favored his innocent fancy; the banks have opened, the iris and silver-weed have drawn near to play with the water, the elder-trees have bent over to shade him, and man, by establishing a ford, has enabled him to rest himself, and to start again without effort. There is a sweetness in all this which cannot be found in the broader cultivation of the plains, or in the struggle with large currents of water. Imperfect cultivation has its small enemies; but it compromises with them, and yields something, in order to receive something in exchange. If this stream were more confined in its course, the meadow would not be so fresh and green; so also, if these rocks which occupy a portion of the soil were removed, the soil itself would be washed down by the rain, and would fill up and turn the bed of the stream.

to yours. Is it material comfort? I am accustomed to dispense with it, and, even if you were not certain of acquiring it, you are strong enough to dispense with it also. Is it glory, influence, some little authority over others? You are too sensible to desire this, and I have never even thought about it. We are, therefore, quite sufficient unto ourselves, and may consider ourselves strong in our philosophy. Who, then, will find his happiness in self, if we cannot there find ours?

"Well! We do not there find it complete and assured, because its indispensable complement is outside of us, because there is no voluntary and solid bond between ourselves and those other *selves* who compose the society in which we live, and because, if we had this bond, this ideal of a perfect society in France, we should still need, in order to solidify it, the accession of other societies founded on the same basis: a European brotherhood; and beyond this still, Europe would need a universal brotherhood. So long as there exist societies which protest against the principle, the principle will have to contend, and all contention disturbs happiness, if it do not exclude it. What satisfaction can you hope to derive from your fellow-man, when you hold him to be your enemy? Under the law of each for himself, we are all enemies, each of the other, and, in this respect, we are still living in a savage state. We tear the limbs from our prey, and, if we dared, we should kill each other, in order to gratify our unsatisfied desires. Where is the happiness of being rich, if we must always fear being robbed by thieves or fleeced by swindlers? Where is the security of love, so infinitely precious and rare in its completeness, if, all around us, ill-restrained ardor, faithless friendship, and unchaste desire, constantly threaten the treasure we strive in vain to hide? Where is the

happiness of doing good, when every one sees the frightful insufficiency of his resources, and the inexhaustible mine of misery? When you have given to one poor person, a hundred others present themselves, to whom you cannot give, or to whom you can, at most, give only the bread of the body, without a hope of relieving in them the debasement and the vices of despair. Where is the intoxication of glory, or of any success, when you remember the irritation of your rivals, and the hatred which awaits you? Where is the delight of contemplating and studying nature, when you know that so many eyes and intellects are closed to its benefits and its beauties?

"I might thus enumerate all the elements of which invidual happiness is composed, and should have a hundred thousandfold more than enough examples and proofs to show you that the absence of association in interest, and, consequently, in feeling, renders the sum of happiness which each can find in himself almost null. Your idea is as sensible as that of a man who should expect to make a river flow by isolating each drop of water in a separate receptacle. Humanity is one being, and, in order that each animated portion of that being may concur in the development and duration of its life, general and absolute conditions of life for the whole being are necessary. It is by this means, only, that each of its molecules can live the life that is fitted for it, and can fulfil the particular function assigned to it. When I reflect how far we are from these vital conditions, I renounce the idea of happiness upon earth, I do not see that it is possible within me or without me, and there are days when, annihilated, I hide myself among the rocks, resting my aching head and my exhausted hands upon their arid flanks, as if to ask from them the inestimable privilege they enjoy, that of knowing how to wait with

out impatience and without fear for the long-deferred transformation of things. This is why I love the stones. They can be isolated without suffering, and I often wish that I could be as calm and as patient as they; but the strong potentiality that is in man resumes its sway, and, instructed by the imposing majesty of inert things, that inexhaustible reservoir of things that are to live, I feel my faith reanimated. I exercise myself in the science of *waiting*, that is, in the certainty of the resources of my kind, and I say to myself that the best men, the happy men, are to be produced from those of whom Rousseau said, but yesterday: '*Wretched human beings that we are!*'"

He concluded by saying: "Now you understand my formula: Happiness is within us and without us. I will add, that with these two terms only it is incomplete. We must further say that it is *beyond us*, and I have proved this to you by showing you from what conception of the meaning of the future I derive my courage. We shall therefore love ourselves, love our fellows, and love them as we do ourselves, in that fulfilment of time which the Divine Logic enables us clearly to foresee. I cannot say that I consider my contemporaries very wise or very amiable, but they are perfectible, and, on that account, I love them in the present, as well as in the past and future. With this feeling, though I may suffer, I am not radically unhappy; but what a distance there is between this relative virtue, these theories of transition, this philosophy painfully acquired and diligently guarded, and the felicity which man will one day find in himself and in others! Then he will perceive that this earth, so often excommunicated by the mystics, this valley of tears, this field of conflict, is a delicious oasis among the innumerable oases of immensity. But I will speak to you some other day

of the intrinsic happiness which our planet enjoys; I have gabbled too much to-day already, and haven't caught a single fish."

He left me without making the slightest allusion to the project of marriage, which I attributed to him the other day. Can I have deceived myself, or has he seen that such a project cannot be realized? On the whole, I am greatly pleased at finding my *infant* just the same as he was before his personal adventures. He is once more absorbed in his philosophical ideal, and forgets the cares and disappointments of actual life. I have thought it best to write out our whole conversation for you. You love our hermit; and this sketch of his doctrine explains that of his character, which you have more than once reproached me with leaving incomplete.

Gédéon has written as follows: "You seem to avoid us; and, as you give no reason, I must try to guess it. Voyons! A certain beauty in red ribbons is away for a week. If this news should bring our friend back, we would be more discreet and more prudent in future."

The last sentence is enigmatical. Do they blame themselves for having rather compromised Jeanne as regards me, and do they promise not to do so any more; or do they promise not to attempt to entangle me, and to give me time for reflection? No matter which — I will go to La Tilleraie to-morrow. Why should I not go this evening? It is only eight o'clock, and it will be so pleasant to come home at midnight by the clear sight of the stars.

L'Escabeau, 17.

I resume my yesterday's letter. I did spend m[illegible] ing at La Tilleraie, and a delightful evening i[illegible] There were no strangers there, the children were i[illegible] and Mlle. Vallier, who usually, like them, re[illegible]

pavilion at nine o'clock, consented to remain. Gédéon entreated her to do so, saying that I should have a stupid time without her. She smiled while she replied that she did not think herself very amusing.

"There is only one person whom I do amuse," she added, "and that is my poor Zoe, who is not very hard to please, and who finds the evening very dull when I stay here late."

"Well!" cried Gédéon, "I will go and get her."

"Do not think of it. She is not properly dressed, and will not dare to come."

"Bah! I will tell her that you want her."

"You will make her anxious."

"No, I will make her laugh, and she likes nothing better."

"But you are not to go in," returned Mlle. Vallier, in a decided, though pleasant tone; "my domicile is inviolable. You know the stipulation."

"Parbleu!" replied Gédéon, gayly. "I will play an air on the guitar for her, and then she must come out on the balcony. Come with me, Pierre; you shall sing."

Taking a guitar from the little parlor, he led me to serenade the negress, while the demoiselles Nuñez and Aldine followed to see the fun. There was no fun, however, for Zoe, who was watching for her mistress with her usual impatience, came out to meet her, and we brought her back with us to the drawing-room, where she went to work at once, rolling up allumettes for the mantlepiece. I remarked Gédéon's refinement — that is the word — in talking with the negress, as with a child whom he wished to adopt also, and whose presence on a footing of equality with his guests he would insist upon in case of need. He reproached her for never coming to the musical soirées, and asked her if it was from vanity, that

is for want of a dress, that she so hid herself. To this the negress answered no, that she had handsomer dresses than *Missis*, because when *Missis* bought two she kept the cheapest and ugliest for herself. She added that, if she did not come to the chateau, it was because she was black, and born a slave, and therefore inferior to a white servant.

Gédéon was probably on the point of saying what I was thinking, when I heedlessly anticipated him, and told Zoe that she must remember that she had been nursed and treated by Mlle. Vallier like a sister, and that consequently everybody owed the same respect to her as to her mistress. Mlle. Vallier looked at me with some surprise, and I hastened to add that I was certain of having expressed the thought of the master of the house.

"And I thank you for having interpreted me," said Gédéon, smiling, "for I could not have expressed myself so well."

Perhaps he felt a little vexed, but I exerted myself to remove the impression; he recovered his serenity, and the conversation became friendly and natural.

I found that I did not know Mlle. Vallier. She is more than a charming woman: she is a very finely organized one, and I am no longer in the least surprised that a man of wealth and solid standing in society should wish to place her at the head of his family, and of his house. She must have an exquisite tact, and a deep feeling of the nicest proprieties, in order to conduct herself with so much modesty and pride in the delicate position in which she is placed. If she do love Gédéon, it is with so much reserve and decorum, that one cannot discern in her the slightest emotion in the midst of the attentions with which he surrounds her, and the officiousness with which he in some sort overwhelms her; for she cannot make a

movement, lift her eyes, or stretch out her hand, without his hastening to guess what she wants, and to serve her with nervous impetuosity. I cannot tell if she be flattered or displeased by this; she does not seem to perceive it. She speaks to him in a perfectly unembarrassed manner; but one cannot guess if this be the result of absolute confidence, or of inexorable indifference. It is all very remarkable, and I am compelled to believe that she tranquilly takes possession of the position he offers, as of a thing she knows to be due to her superior wisdom and inimitable grace. Yes, she is born for the most elevated positions, perhaps for the most difficult; and Gédéon understands that she does him great honor in accepting his millions.

There is nothing in her that betokens ambition, great or small. The conversation turned on the hermit of Grez. Gédéon has now seen him several times, and spoke in the highest terms of his manners and his good sense. His sisters, who had never been very curious about the peculiarities of the old man, began to inquire by what means he could be attracted to the house, and neither Mlle. Vallier nor I could answer all their questions. They really tried to guess what formerly celebrated personage this superior man could be who had fallen into such utter poverty, or had voluntarily devoted himself to a cenobitic life, and endeavored to ascertain what historical individual had mysteriously disappeared from the world's stage within the last ten years.

"I cannot answer you," replied Gédéon. "I know nothing. I believe that Mlle. Vallier and friend Pierre do know all about him; but they will not tell you; they are inscrutable."

I studied Gédéon's face attentively as he said this, and thought I could see that he knew as much as we. Per-

haps Mlle. Vallier, by permission of the hermit, has confided the secret to him, or, perhaps, the hermit himself may have told him. We quieted the two old demoiselles, by assuring them that all efforts to draw M. Sylvestre to their salon would be perfectly useless, and would not be pleasing to him; and, when they exclaimed about the strange love of such a man for solitude and poverty, Mlle. Vallier replied in such a manner as to make them feel that she appreciated much more the freedom of such an existence, than the opulence which they valued so highly. Thence fresh surprise on their part.

"That is," she said, "because you do not understand the compensations that are to be found in independence, and the feeling of one's own strength. To those who have passed from a hampered life to its most simple expression, all that appears necessary to you seems absolutely useless, and many things which you find pleasant, are to them both irksome and fatiguing."

They protested strongly against what they called a paradox. Gédéon sat thoughtful, and said nothing. I ventured to speak, and said that the only happiness of an exalted soul like Mlle. Vallier's, was to be found in self-sacrifice.

"Do not exaggerate," she replied. "That is a tendency, and not happiness. It is the consolation of the unhappy; their recompense is in seeing their sacrifices become useful. It is duty, with its sorrows and its joys. It is not happiness."

"Then," said Gédéon, "happiness is —"

"I really know nothing about it," she resumed. "There are some persons so bound to the wheel of duty that they have no leisure to learn if there be such a thing as happiness, and have not even the right to think about it."

"All have the right to escape from duties which exceed their strength," replied Gédéon. "It is almost always a question of money, and everybody has the right to get rich; but you have certain opinions — I may call them prejudices — against riches, and I believe that Pierre shares them."

I replied no, but thought it my duty to develop my short theory. You know what it is: If riches well acquired be well employed, I consider them as good tools in the hands of good workmen, but I look upon them as an evil when they become the selfish object of personal activity. To work for collective and social wealth, while contenting one's self with a condition in which labor is a good, a virtue, and a means of health, is normal ambition and legitimate employment; but all that goes beyond or militates against this limit, is vanity, intemperance, or mania.

Gédéon replied quite wisely that, in a well-ordered society, the merit of an individual could be determined by the amount of his property: he who should live in poverty would justly be deemed incapable, idle, or a prodigal, and he who should attain to a useless opulence might be accused of cupidity, want of judgment, or craziness. But in the disturbed world in which we live it is not so: poverty may be greatness, and wealth virtue; everything depends on chances, necessities, badly distributed occupations, abnormal obligations, upon all, in fine, that is factitious or forced, brutal or blind, in a world in process of transformation from top to bottom. Therefore we cannot say that a man is good or bad because he is rich, or because he is poor; we must know his life, or reserve our judgment.

"I myself," he added, "have worked very hard in order to become rich. My parents taught me no other

science than that of making money with money. They required that all my will, all my intellect, all my energy, all my time, should be devoted to that arid task, and, as my instincts were repugnant to it, I was threatened with their malediction. I yielded to their wish, and have felt the fever of gain, which is the gambler's passion, develop itself in me, take possession of, transform and intoxicate me, as is the case with all who do violence to their natures and throw themselves into extremes; but I had the happiness to stop myself in time. Once more free, I left business, and have now no other interest in it than to help others. I have felt the force of affection, and comprehended that happiness is to be found there. I believe that I am in the right way, and have no great matter to reproach myself with, for if, first from thoughtlessness and then from ambition, my earlier youth was rather badly regulated, I have had the triumph of quite a healthy maturity, and am now rich without being either a genius or an idiot, either a rascal or a great man."

"No one here can take the liberty of judging you," replied Mlle. Vallier, "and the course you took in leaving business proves that, as to theory, we are agreed. I can therefore say, without fear of offending you in any manner, that it does not become the poor to dream of wealth, and the burden of obligations which it imposes, for they would not be equal to it."

Here Gédéon rose from his chair, and spoke with unexpected animation, as if, wounded to the heart by Mlle. Vallier's disdain of his social preëminence, which he had pretended to hold so cheap, he had decided to make her sensible of its value.

"If you intend," he said, "that your words shall have a general application, you condemn all poor persons without exception. I will not undertake to defend the rich

lest I should fall into commonplace criticism or eulogium, which can only end in personalities; but you betray still more the cause you seem to defend, as, if you are right, all the poor are incapable or selfish."

"It seems to me," said I, in my turn, "that we are now confounding riches and poverty with their results."

"Well!" returned Gédéon, "in our present social condition, it is impossible to do otherwise: wealth is in itself a power, and, as we have not yet found the means of distributing its benefits equally, there are necessarily people who are more or less powerful in society, according as they are more or less rich. Poverty constitutes a state of weakness: he who can do nothing for himself can do nothing for others, while the rich man can do a great deal for himself, and for many others; if he use his power badly, or not at all, so much the worse for society. Misers are fools, who cut off their hands in order not to bear the burden of duty; and prodigals are another kind of crazy people, who throw away their arms in the midst of the battle of life. Both are the victims of infatuation, but what does that prove against riches? Because there are drunkards who ruin their health and kill themselves, does it follow that wine is not a generous cordial, intended to refresh both body and mind? To wish always to acquire, without making use of what one has acquired, is certainly a disease which I have already condemned; but do not tell me that the wish not to have property is either virtue or wisdom. It is the same as if you should tell me that, being weak, one ought not to wish to acquire strength. It is to deny common sense, to take away from man the desire for improvement: it is to deny progress; and I am surprised at finding this doctrine of incompetence and idleness maintained by two disciples of M. Sylvestre."

"Permit me," replied Mlle. Vallier. "M. Sylvestre

believes that if wealth be not a collective force, the benefits of which can be distributed among all men, it is because it is too much concentrated in the hands of a few who do not care, or do not know how, to cause the great number to profit by it. According to him, the rich are disproportionately strong people, who, far from helping and elevating the weak, are, for the most part, determined to crush them. Let us admit that he is mistaken, that he does not know them, that the greater number are men of progress and intelligence, and that we owe to their initiative the wonders of industry and the hope of universal well-being; still, it is none the less true that this host of unfortunates and incapables, who are dependant upon a few capable persons, disposing of all social power, and perfectly at liberty to make a bad use of it, does not present a very comforting picture. For my own part, I can readily understand that one may be anxious, and that a tender-hearted and proud man, like our hermit, may be naturally inclined to take the part of the weak and incompetent many against the happy and powerful few, who possess everything and can do everything."

"Therefore the rich must be ruined, robbed, or hung," said Gédéon, with bitter merriment. "If your hermit be right, I can see no other conclusion: confiscation, exile, or death, for all capitalists, after which men will live like brothers, and will all know how to create wealth."

Mlle. Vallier's burst of laughter caused Gédéon to recover himself. "I know," he resumed, "that you have a horror of such things, but what is your hermit driving at, in fine?"

"Oh! I do not know," she replied, "he has never told me; it would be labor lost. If he have a system, I could not understand it, but I certainly do know that he does not want to kill or rob anybody, and that he does

not make incendiary harangues, for he never tells his thought except to his intimate friends."

"That is to you and Pierre?"

"Why should you care, since you think him crazy?"

"I do not say that; I should like to know him better, and to ascertain if your friend be a dreamer, a madman, or an apostle."

"He is neither of the three — he is a sage."

"And you, Pierre, what do you say?"

"I say that he is a saint."

"That is by no means the same thing."

"Assuredly no," I replied; "saints have the right to disregard the sad, cold limits of reason."

"Reason is not wisdom," said Mlle. Vallier; "real sages despise the selfishness and mean prudence of the world. True wisdom is sanctity, and true sanctity is holy and sublime wisdom."

"Well, I give it up as regards M. Sylvestre," said Gédéon, "but the question of riches is not solved. Mlle. Vallier does not say what is to be done with the rich."

"We must make sages of them," she replied.

"That is, hermits?"

"No, that would require too much of the ideal; but there is wisdom, and wisdom. It is for you rich men to practise that which does not exceed your strength. I have no need of rising to such an elevation, and cannot teach you."

"What do you mean by that? I do not understand you. Pierre, do you understand?" And he looked at me with eyes at once beseeching and threatening.

"No," I replied, "I can see no reason whatever why Mlle. Vallier should not aspire to a moral grandeur which she knows how to define so well."

"I will explain," she said. "Great duties are moun-

tains which I do not feel obliged to scale. I am not very strong, and have already got a good deal tired by going up and down little insignificant hills, where the roads were very rough. Probably I have not got through yet, therefore I am not obliged to get ready for anything else; and what I have to do is quite enough for my strength. The wisdom of people in my position, consists in knowing how to do without what you call happiness. Oh! I have read M. Sorède's article in the "Revue," very carefully; I do not know as yet whether he believes in happiness or not, the question is not in that phase for me; but I have drawn my own little conclusion beforehand: it is, that men have in all times made themselves unhappy by wishing to be more happy than it was necessary for them to be, and I have asked myself seriously if they deserve such great felicity, when everything in the universe submits to suffering, and is content with the amount of compensation that falls to its share. Since happiness, which I suppose to be the full exercise of a great plenitude of exalted faculties, is so difficult, not to say impossible, of attainment, why should we not place our ambition in the possession of something more easy to secure — resignation, for instance, modesty of aspiration, gentle and pious wisdom, a tender patience, which I will compare, if you please, to a day of fine rain with some sweet rays of sunshine? Can we not live upon that, when we are neither eagle nor lion, nor conqueror, nor endowed with immense strength, nor St. Michael, nor a millionaire, nor a hermit? I can understand that M. Sorède, a writer, may be ambitious of fame, that M. Nuñez, a philosopher, may dream of the triumphs of stoicism, but the mass of martyrs do not require so much; let them peacefully mount the steps of their unknown

Calvary, while each says: 'I cannot drink the sea, I must and will be content with a drop of dew.' "

I try to render to you as well as I can the fluent and charming words of Mlle. Vallier. She spoke with such touching and graceful conviction, that Gédéon, carried away, made a movement to seize her hands and kiss them; but, as if she anticipated this, she rose without looking at him, and went over to Zoe, to whom she said, patting her on the shoulder:

"Do you know, child, that it's eleven o'clock? The doctor would scold if he knew you were up. Come, let us go home."

While speaking to her negress, she happened, I can't tell how, to meet my eyes, and I can still less tell how or why they were moist: the picture she had just drawn of resignation had probably affected me. I saw her shudder almost imperceptibly, but that shudder only expressed surprise, and I think that Gédéon did not perceive it.

"How strong she is, and what a sweet character she has!" cried he, when she had gone.

"She is an angel!" said one of the sisters.

"She is a saint!" said the other; and both retired.

"And you, friend Pierre, what do you think about it?" asked Gédéon, when we were alone.

"I think that you are a *sage* to have chosen her; but I think also that I have work to do, and must run."

"One moment! just tell me — tell me if you think she will forgive me for being rich."

"Do you want her to consider it a merit in you?"

"No; you are right. If she accept me, I shall be sure to please her."

"Amen! and good-night, my dear friend."

He followed me home, under pretence of needing a walk, but really to make me the confidant of his per-

plexities, which seemed to me quite amusing. At one moment, he fears being accepted for his fortune; at another, he wants to have it taken into consideration. That is a dilemma in which neither you nor I will find ourselves. Moreover, he wants to learn through me if he is loved. He thinks that he will be, but he is impatient. He repeated to me ten times over: "Try to make her say so." But that is rather too delicate a commission; I shall not undertake it.

XXXIX.

From Pierre to Philippe.

L'Escabeau, 25 July.

MLLE. JEANNE still remains absent. I go frequently to La Tilleraie, and spend many a pleasant hour there. Now that I am sure of not being in love with the future Madame Nuñez, I find a great charm in the society of that remarkable person. My sympathy, being entirely disinterested, enables me to appreciate her more and more every day. The foolish spite I felt against her has entirely disappeared. I consider it as natural as possible that she should be touched by my friend Gédéon's attentions, and I must say that I was also mistaken respecting that sincere and generous man. It is so easy to be unjust towards the rich. This is not envy, but exaction. We feel that they do really wield great social power, but we impose upon them duties which exceed the always limited power they possess. And then we attribute to them an overweening vanity which does not always exist. Gédéon certainly has nothing of the kind, for he often appears to entertain unreasonable doubts of the success of his hopes, and appeals to me with childish simplicity *to teach him how to please*, as if I possessed that secret — I, who have never yet pleased anybody, except one foolish little girl, and then without wishing to!

He pretends that there is something essentially vulgar in his ideas and manners. This may be true, but it is

compensated by a second quality which always redeems or effaces the first, and an intelligent woman must lay much more stress upon the continual struggle with himself which she can attribute to her influence. If Mlle. Vallier does not do this, she is unjust. I have been alone with her once or twice, and took the opportunity to speak earnestly in praise of Gédéon. She replied in such a manner as to prove that she observes and appreciates the excellent points of his mind and character even better than I. I repeated her words to my friend: I wanted to burn my ships. He was affected even to tears. Even if he be not passionately loved, his state of mind deserves envy: he loves and he hopes.

Yes, Philippe, in presence of the fact, I now recognize the truth: happy are those who can love. I have denied this, I know, or at least I have believed that besides simple and tranquil conjugal friendship, there was nothing but an over-excitement of the senses or of the imagnation. I now see clearly that there is something more, since so practical a man as the one before me experiences such sweet and strong emotions. Perhaps the influence of a woman who is sincere and earnest as well as graceful and charming, is required to produce this feeling, which is a mixture of ardor and delicacy. It creates the need of living a double life in an intellectual and moral sense. You can no longer be content with your own approbation, you feel that it is cold and barren. You seek for your conscience in that of your beloved, you surrender it to her, you wish her to interrogate and to appreciate it, and a word of encouragement vouchsafed by her thrills you, her praise intoxicates you. You exist no longer for yourself alone, you see that you were foolish in trying to find in yourself a strength which was not in you, and you discover that this strength, born of the breath of love,

XL.

From M. Piermont to M. Sylvestre.

Paris, 25 July.

MONSIEUR: I have learned from M. Diamant, who is a very estimable man, and much devoted to my family, that you are a real philosopher, living in an extraordinary manner, and practising the most wonderful wisdom. My age and my infirmities do not permit me to visit you, for it appears that you dwell on a hill, to which there is no carriage-road, and I confess that I am not able to raise myself to your height, either physically or morally. Besides, I am told that you do not like visits, and I discreetly abstain; but I take the liberty of writing to ask of you some advice, and, perhaps, a service.

I am assured that you are the friend of my nephew, Pierre Sorède, and that he entertains for you the greatest esteem, the greatest confidence, and the greatest respect. It is of him that I wish to write to you.

When his parents died they left no property, but his mother's brother, M. le Vicomte de Pontgrenet, a saving and quite rich old bachelor, was still living; he was under the control of a housekeeper, who begrudged him all she could, and made him bequeath all his property to her. M. le Vicomte repented, however, and, shortly before his death, came to me and intrusted to my care the sum of one hundred thousand francs, which he begged

me to invest in my own name. The person who lived with him did not know of the existence of this sum, and M. le Vicomte requested that the said deposit, of which he made no mention in his Will, should be transferred by me, capital and interest, to his only nephew, Pierre Sorède, when the latter should attain the age of twenty-five years. The proof of this intention is contained in a note of three lines, a copy of which I enclose in this letter, and the original of which, Pierre, who insists that he will receive nothing from me, can see in my hands. I therefore hold at his disposition a capital of one hundred and fifty thousand francs, which he can have in three months from this date, in order to conform to the expressed wish of the testator as regards the completion of the twenty-five years.

In conformity with that wish, I have kept the deposit so placed in my hands an absolute secret. M. le Vicomte was afraid of his housekeeper, was afraid of his own weakness, and was therefore reduced to the necessity of deceiving that woman, in order to assure a small portion of his fortune to his sister's son. After his death, I considered it my duty still to keep the secret, in order to guard against any iniquitous reclamation on the part of that creature. She is now dead, and we have nothing more to fear. I might, therefore, have informed Pierre, who came to see me last month, of the resources he possesses, which will enable him to establish himself to his liking; but I was afraid of some folly on his part. I have been told that he is madly in love with Mlle. Vallier, whom I formerly wished him to marry, but who, being now entirely ruined, is no longer a suitable match for him. I now learn, however, from M. Diamant, that this young lady is about to make a very fine marriage, and I know, moreover, through Mme. Duport, that my

nephew is in a position to please Mlle. Jeanne de Magneval, who would be a great match for him. Pierre has feelings of pride, for which I do not blame him, and would not like, while poor, to offer himself to a rich heiress; but I think that, on finding himself in a position which, without being brilliant, is quite honorable, he would have no further scruples, and might yield to an inclination which I am far from disapproving.

In the interest of my nephew's welfare, I therefore beg you, monsieur, to inform him of the subject of this letter, unless, indeed, you see some objection thereto. For instance, if Mlle. Vallier should fail of her marriage with M. Gédéon Nuñez, and if, falling back upon my nephew, she should cause him to forego the hope of pleasing Mlle. de Magneval, you would certainly agree with me that the young man should not be put in a position to commit a folly, and you would wait until the danger should be past.

Not having the advantage to possess the confidence of Pierre, who has a good heart, certainly, but who is very notional and Quixotic, I commit his fate to your hands, and beg of you, monsieur, to excuse my proceeding, and to believe me your very humble servant,

BAPTISTE PIERMONT.

XLI.

From M. Sylvestre to M. Piermont.

L'Ermitage, 28 July.

I REGRET, monsieur, that I cannot respond to your confidence with that conformity of views which would give you satisfaction, but the secret which you have confided to me is no longer yours or mine. From the moment that the gift which you are charged to transmit to your nephew is no longer in danger of being disputed, Pierre should be informed of his situation, and if his ignorance respecting that situation should influence his present course in a direction contrary to his inclination, you might have reason to blame yourself seriously. Trust to his good sense, therefore, and let me tell him the truth. Pierre is neither notional nor Quixotic — you do not know him; on the contrary, his mind is a very serious one, his character very energetic, and his integrity proof against all temptation, while he is in no way disposed to permit himself to be controlled by his passions. I do not know what his feelings may be towards Mlle. Vallier, but I can assure you that he has no inclination for Mlle. de Magneval, and that, as this young person also honors me with her confidence, I shall do what I have already done, which is: advise her never to think of M. Pierre. Renounce, therefore, an illusion which is entirely groundless

and reflect that, in three months, you will be compelled to tell your nephew what you hesitate to tell him now. Let him dispose of his future, and consequently feel obliged to you for a proof of the esteem and confidence he deserves.

Accept, monsieur, the expression of my distinguished regards.

SYLVESTRE.

XLII.

From Pierre to Philippe.

1 August, L'Escabeau.

MY dear friend, my Philippe, only think of it! I am rich, very rich, seven or eight thousand francs income: a romance, a posthumous gift of my mother's brother! I will tell you all about it another time. I am crazy with joy. Shameful, isn't it, for a philosopher! You see you don't understand, and how should you understand! I have been deceiving myself and you for the past three months. *I am in love with Mlle. Vallier.* Either I didn't know it, or I didn't want to know it; but I am sure it was my duty not to confess it to myself, and not to speak of it even to my best friend. Love, the enchanted island, was inaccessible, for I had no vessel. Now I have one bark, at least, and why should I not fight Gédéon's fleet? She does not love him; I felt it, and now I know it, for the hermit has told me so. I have never tried to win her confidence, I have never let her even suspect that I was agitated in her presence, and that, when away from her, she was always in my thoughts. Haven't I the right to tell her now? If I can't offer her opulence, I can at least offer her, not only courage, and a fair amount of capacity, but also a modest competence, and the certainty of what is necessary. Poverty is rather the fear of to-morrow than the suffering of to-day. In marriage everything is

to-morrow, everything is foresight, and the happiness of being a father is smothered by the fear of leaving orphans without resources. Why, then, should not I have a wife and children? I, who am neither a gallant nor a libertine, nor a seeker after adventures, nor possessed with the vanity of vice? I have a position, and, with my humble talent, am a man perhaps a little in advance of the crowd, and I am sure of not being a coward, a scapegrace, or a fool. I ought to be amiable, but I am not, I never have been. I was not my own master: I was distrustful, haughty, and reserved, as those in my situation are compelled to be, when they do not mean to deceive or to beg; but who knows if I be not a man to be loved? In order to be so, must a man prostrate himself before the woman he loves, overwhelm her with praise, and anticipate her most trifling wish? If so, then Gédéon is amiable, and he is not beloved. So it is not necessary to be like him. Like whom, then! I am sure I cannot tell; it must be a matter of inspiration.

My friend, advise me: What shall I say? What shall I do? Gédéon has confided his cause to me, I have promised to be his advocate, and he deserves gratitude more than I do, since he offers a lot a thousandfold more happy than my humble mediocrity. What will he think of me when I tell him? — for I must tell him, or betray him, and the latter is impossible! It is also impossible for me to see Mlle. Vallier without a change of front, and without letting her perceive that I detest the idea of her marriage with any other man but myself. Not to see her, to go away and wait until she has deprived Gédéon of every hope, would be the wiser course; but suppose she should begin to love him, in my absence! Even the thought makes me crazy, and I no

longer recognize myself. I am even a little ashamed of myself, for I feel that I am overpowered by the enemy I braved, and love reveals to me agitations which are perhaps unworthy of a serious mind. I am uneasy, suspicious, sleepless, restless, purposeless, and suddenly possessed with a sharp, blind, jealous will, prepared to act wrongly rather than renounce my object, and capable of disregarding scruples of conscience which now appear nothing to me, after having made me heroic hitherto. This is hope. Then it is temptation; then it is an evil?

I opened my heart to my old friend Sylvestre. He was perfectly surprised, perfectly stunned. He did not utter one word of blame; he asked time for reflection: two or three days. I promised; but shall I be able to keep my promise? How? La Tilleraie is only a quarter of an hour's walk; I go there every day, and must not go there to-day or to-morrow! And while I am staying here, foolishly waiting for the advice of an old man, who no longer knows what love is, perhaps Gédéon will compel, from esteem and gratitude, a promise that cannot be revoked.

Ten o'clock in the evening. — I wanted to try my strength, and to ascertain the state of my heart, and I have been at La Tilleraie. Gédéon was not there; he has gone to Paris on business for a couple of days. If I had known that, I should not have gone. I suffered a good deal. It would be an apparent perfidy if I disclosed myself during his absence. He must know my secret before it escapes me. I was almost alone with *her;* one of the sisters being indisposed, and in her room, while the other went and came without mistrust, leaving to Mlle. Vallier the task of keeping me company. The doctor, who had been sent for to visit the sick sister, remained in the parlor only a moment; but that moment almost brought about

a crisis. I have told you about that excellent man, the same who attended Zoe. He practises medicine and surgery in the neighborhood. He is much attached to Mlle. Vallier, and, with a frankness which was blunt and rather embarrassing, though he did not know it, he, in a manner, complimented her on the marriage with Gédéon, saying that it was the talk of the country. She replied that, in such case, the country was busying itself about a matter of which she had not yet heard.

When he was gone, I asked her why she denied a fact which appeared to be notorious; why she practised such dissimulation with a friend like the doctor; and if I was not also a kind of friend, or at least a devoted servant, who she ought to know could keep a secret.

"Do you wish to know the truth? You want to tell M. Nuñez, do you not?"

"I presume that he does not need to be informed."

"But he must have told you how we are situated."

"He says that he hopes and that he fears."

"If he hopes — I must leave his house."

"Then he does wrong to hope?"

"That is a question not to be answered; but he promised me that he would not hope until he was authorized to do so by me. If he fail in his word, I am not obliged to keep mine."

"That depends. What did you promise him?"

"To consider. If he has told you anything else, he did not take my answer as serious, and then I ought to go, in order not to find myself engaged without my knowledge."

I felt greatly agitated. Gédéon has certainly allowed me to believe that he had received encouragement. But I had not yet the right to injure his cause by telling the truth; and the embarrassing position in which his confidence had

placed me, compelled me to lie to Mlle. Vallier. I tried to evade her question; she insisted.

"I wish to know if M. Nuñez expects me to accept his offer?"

I had to make a terrible effort. I replied that he did not expect anything; but that a man deeply in love had, if not the right, at least the liberty to hope.

"I asked M. Sylvestre's advice," returned Mlle. Vallier; "he told me to consider, and I am considering. M. Nuñez accepted the position, which is to continue a certain time; but if he do not accept it literally, it is useless to prolong it. I have not yet had time enough to make up my mind: I will go and consider elsewhere."

"Would it not be better to hasten your self-examination a little? Is it so difficult?"

"Is it for him that you advise this?"

"No, for myself. You see that people talk about your marriage. Is it well to make one's self talked about?"

"Ah! If Zoe were only radically cured! I have made many sacrifices for that poor child; but this that I am now making for her is certainly the hardest of all. Tenez! If I should say to her this evening: 'Come, let us pack up our trunks, and leave this beautiful house,' I could not be sure that she would not have a relapse to-morrow, while if I could only wait a few weeks longer she would recover her strength completely."

"So it is for Zoe, still always for her, that you accept unhappiness! Yesterday, it was poverty; to-day, it is importunity; to-morrow, it will perhaps be calumny."

"Most certainly it is not for myself."

"I respect your tenderness for that child; but do you not fear that it may be carried too far?"

"I know that self-sacrifice has certain limits. It is said that a woman ought not to sacrifice her reputation

for any one. Well! There are circumstances in which one must resign one's self even to that. If you had lived my life, you would be as tender and as weak as I am. Among my many deep griefs, I had the sorrow to lose my brother, a child of wonderful sweetness and sensibility, the living image of my mother. It was not that God had made him too weak to live, it was another's injustice and brutality that killed him. When I saw him on his death-bed, where he languished for several months, I felt sure that kindness and sympathy would restore him; but we were separated, and the tenderness which works miracles was wanting. Therefore, when I saw Zoe in a similar situation, I made a vow that she should not die for want of care or affection. It is not everybody that knows how bitter, how horrible it is to see those die whom we think we might have saved. I do know it, and whether I am right or wrong, whether my friends approve or disapprove, I shall never hesitate between duty to myself, and the life of those who have nobody but me to care for them."

While she was thus speaking and referring to her brother, her face was covered with the tears that flowed unconsciously.

I longed to throw myself at her feet, and to say the maddest things. I had no fear of appearing absurd; but I did fear to appear mean, and that restrained me. Some one interrupted us, and I withdrew in a few minutes. Now I say to myself that I should not have been in the least mean. Is she not free? Has not Gédéon lost his cause? Is it not he who has been rather mean in concealing the truth from me, and in confiding his hopes to me with so much assurance, even laying plans in my presence, and talking of his happiness in the future rather than the conditional tense? In fine, have not I

been his dupe, the confidant of an imaginary happiness, the keeper of a chateau en Espagne? Why should he let his family and all the country believe and say that his marriage was fully decided upon? It is like Harlequin's marriage, which was *half-made*, for the reason that he wanted to marry Isabella: it was true that Isabella did not want to marry Harlequin.

Poor Gédéon! I blame and I accuse him; but I have no right to do so as yet. I must have an explanation with him, and see if, on a serious interrogation, to which I have not yet the coolness or the courage to subject him, he persist in his self-flattering illusions. And I should take back my promise to help him, and frankly declare to him that I, too, love Mlle. Vallier, and intend to tell her so, even if I irritate him, and make him a mortal enemy. I should? I must. Otherwise I should be a cheat, in his opinion. I will wait for his return, and will not see Aldine till then, in spite of my present feeling as to my right to do so. Gédéon has trifled with me unwarrantably in this matter; I do not wish to trifle with him, and will not.

I am devoured by an impatience which torments me. No matter. I see clearly that love is a terrible thing: it is happiness, nevertheless. A terrible happiness! What a strange definition! But why should we expect happiness to be calm? Can so great a word be applicable to a negative state? Is it not rather an exasperation of the vital power, and is it not good to feel, some fine morning, that you are superior to yourself?

Moreover, of what consequence is it whether love be happiness or not? It is the real object of man, and, if happiness be but an imaginary object, it is very easy to do without it, when you have such a palpitating, intoxicating reality to lay hold of.

XLIII.

From Philippe to Pierre.

Volvic, 3 August.

YOUR letter makes me anxious, my dear boy. There is a violent quarrel, perhaps a duel, at the end of the explanation you intend to have with M. Nuñez. Why hasten a denouement which may prove disastrous? Go away and content yourself with writing to him. Yes, you are in the right, for he has deceived you somewhat; but he has done so in good faith, I feel sure, and it would be deplorable to cut a friend's throat on account of a misunderstanding. And then the scandal, the talk about Mlle. Vallier! Take your own time; there is not the least danger in delay: *she does not love him.* Confide your cause to the hermit; he will know if you have the best chance. What do we know about it? What do you know? If you have not, why be in a hurry to break with Gédéon?

In any event, absence is the treatment indicated, and I prescribe it to you, until we can ascertain what the danger is. Do you want me to come and have a talk with that Gédéon? I can pacify him, I can convince him: I am sure of it; but first of all, I will have a talk with Mlle. Vallier, and find out what she thinks of you. If she accept you, I will tell her to leave M. Nuñez' house, where she may be subjected to some affront, in case you

are wanting in prudence. I hope that the hermit will recognize all the dangers of the situation, and save his two friends from them before I arrive. Answer me by telegraph. Tell me that you will wait for me in Paris, and I will be there almost as soon as you. My mother consents, and urges me.

XLIV.

TELEGRAM — TO M. PHILIPPE TAVERNAY, AT VOLVIC.

5 August, PARIS, 2 P. M.

TOO late. Don't be anxious. All right. Don't come. PIERRE SORÈDE.

XLV.

From Pierre to Philippe.

Paris, 5 August.

I HAVE just sent you a telegram, to reassure you. I had to come to town for that purpose, as there is no line in the peaceful valley of Vaubuisson. I have taken the opportunity to make a visit to my uncle, but he is out, and I am writing to you while waiting for him.

Everything that you say is very wise, but too wise for me. You forget that I am no longer the *stoico-sceptic* whom you knew yesterday and the day before; I am a man who loves, who wishes, who acts, and who exists. Prudence for me! I'll none of it. What would she to whom I pretend to offer my life think of me if I did not begin by offering it for her to the vengeance of a rival? And he, too, if he should think that I was acting underhandedly, and with caution, for fear of his anger! For he is furious, poor Gédéon, but he has restrained himself hitherto, and may continue to do so. I will tell you what has taken place.

But first, let me tell you that I have no reason to reproach myself. I have not seen Mlle. Vallier since the interview I told you of. The next day I contented myself with sending a note for Gédéon at La Tilleraie, and asking him to come and see me at L'Escabeau, on important business, as soon as he got home. He came the day after — that is, yesterday.

"My friend," said I to him, "I cannot set foot in your house any more. I am in love with the person whom you wish to marry."

He turned quite pale, but forced a smile, and said:

"What do you mean? Are you joking?"

"It is the most serious word I have ever uttered."

"Allons donc! You, who don't believe in love?"

"I do believe in it now, and you know that I do."

"Ah! Yes, since you have seen me so earnest about it; but on your part it's nothing but a fancy, a dream."

"It is so much the opposite of a dream, that I am resolved to marry Mlle. Vallier, if she will accept me."

"You have made her an offer, then?"

"I have not even let her suspect my passion."

"His passion! Isn't he original? And how far back does this grand passion date?"

"To the day when I first saw her."

"Then you deceived me when you told me —"

"I told you that I had never thought of paying attention to her. I never told you anything else."

"Can any one love *with passion* without wishing to excite love in return?"

"That is a duty, when one has nothing but poverty to offer."

"Then you are rich now?"

"I have enough to live upon: an unexpected inheritance."

"How much?"

"A hundred and fifty thousand francs."

"Peuh!"

"Everything is relative: Mlle. Vallier has only twelve hundred francs income."

"She knows that you have this little fortune?"

"No."

"You came to my house two days ago; you told her then?"

"No."

"But you commissioned the hermit to tell her?"

"I forbade him."

"Then you have not made any declaration to her?"

"Listen, my dear Gédéon: I have not returned to your house since I learned that you were away. I have sent for you to tell you of my feelings and my intentions: to you first of all, without delay, without hesitation, and without reserve; and you ought to understand that I have faithfully kept my word with you. To doubt this would be an insult! and I hope that you do not doubt it."

"You are quite right; I have nothing to complain of in the past, but as to the present;—you may well imagine that I'm not going to authorize you—"

"Excuse me! I do not ask for any kind of authorization."

"You expect to come and cut the ground from under my feet! Tiens! That is rather strong."

"If you are a wise and consistent man, you will yourself tell Mlle. Vallier of my intentions."

"Par exemple! What! Court her for you?"

"You would be returning like for like."

"But you professed indifference, and I do not."

"So much the more reason. Ask her to decide between us. If, as I fear, she does not wish to marry either you or me, let us remain her friends, and show no ridiculous vexation. If she choose you, I will retire without a murmur, and will not love you any less. If it be me whom she accepts, do you consider her choice a legitimate one, and do not feel any hatred towards me.

Anything that you and I do outside of this programme will be ridiculous and absurd."

"Very well reasoned, but I'm not up to it. Mlle. Vallier is pledged to me: she promised to wait three months before she decided; until then nobody has any right to influence her unfavorably, and I prohibit you."

"I do not accept the prohibition. Mlle. Vallier did not pledge herself not to consider any proposal but yours."

"That was understood."

"That is matter for question. I plead against you."

"Then — it is war?"

"If you will; but a loyal war, in which I, for one, do not intend to say anything to your personal disadvantage. My conduct and my instincts have been such that I have no change to make in the manner in which I have spoken to her of you, and the good which I mean always to say is, moreover, necessary to the justice and dignity of my cause."

"So you're a hero of candor and generosity?"

"Why not? It seems easy to me."

"Who would have thought that you would ever be a Don Quixote?"

"I have always liked Don Quixote, and should not feel humiliated if I did happen to resemble him."

"I prefer Sancho's good sense, and don't accept the duel with the windmills. I shan't make your declaration for you."

"I will make it myself."

"Where? How?"

"Since you will not undertake it, I have no account to render to you."

"Very well! I notify you that I shall do my best, and plead strongly against you."

"You may expatiate upon the mediocrity of my for-

tune, for I defy you to say anything against my character."

"If I knew anything, I would say it: I confess that I do not, and I am not the man to calumniate you; but I can certainly tell her that you are crazy."

"What am I crazy about?"

"Que diable! This wheeling round, this affectation of coldness, and then, suddenly, this romance of chivalry, this request that you seriously make that I will sacrifice myself to you, or enter the lists with you like a paladin, all this proceeds from a cracked brain, my dear friend, and it wouldn't take much to make me laugh at it."

"You want to pique me, but you will not succeed. Tell all that to Mlle. Vallier. If she be romantic, as you have sometimes asserted in my presence, you will only help my cause."

"Yes, that's true. Well! I shall depreciate all romantic tendencies. Instead of speaking respectfully and generously of poverty, I shall show her that it's a proof of moral inferiority."

"You have more than one theory at your service, I see; but I forgive you — you are jealous, and don't well know what you say."

"That's quite possible, but, if you're not jealous too, you're not in love."

"I have been very jealous of you. I have been so ever since the day that Mlle. Vallier first entered your house. That did not make me unjust, for, poor as I was, I always spoke to her of riches as a real social power well placed in your hands, and I shall not change my tone. A few days since, you were unwilling to be loved for your wealth, and I do not wish to be loved for my comparative poverty."

"All that is magnificent and unanswerable; but I declare that you are a false friend, selfish and ungrateful."

"Those words are very offensive, but, seeing that you are trying to irritate me, I shall keep my temper. Come, be as calm as I want to be. Show me quietly how I have been selfish and ungrateful. If you prove that I have been, I will acknowledge my guilt. Have you rendered me such services, that I owe you the sacrifice of my whole life? You offered me hospitality and assistance, which I persistently refused."

"Eh! Who's talking about that? If you had accepted, I shouldn't be so mean as to reproach you. I could reproach you with much better reason for having refused, with a caution that betokens an ulterior purpose."

"That is not possible. Try to remember: when I refused your offers, you had not seen Mlle. Vallier."

"I did know her — I had seen her — I had been in love with her for more than a year."

"Then it is you who have deceived me."

"So, now you're beginning to reproach me?"

"Why not? It is without bitterness, and as a necessary part of my justification. You charge me with being ungrateful."

"Yes, I do. When you have accepted a man's friendship and confidence in good faith, you don't try to supplant him; you keep out of temptation, you watch yourself, and don't permit the sudden growth of a caprice that may drive him to despair; you sacrifice it to him, say nothing, and go away. Friendship is a contract, and when you have signed it conscientiously, you don't tear it up at the first whiff of passion that passes through your head, especially when you pretend to be an Amadis or a Grandison."

"My dear Nuñez, you exaggerate the bonds of our

friendship; it was by no means intimate before we met here, and dates back only a few weeks. You made all the advances, which was very amiable in you, but I responded quite reservedly. You confided your love to me as late as possible, when you no longer concealed it from any one, when I had heard of your declared intentions from M. Sylvestre, whom you did not ask to keep them a secret; and all this after having deceived me, I repeat, for, when trying to induce me to persuade Mlle. Vallier to undertake the education of your children, you almost swore to me that you had never seen her face. All this does not indicate a chivalric frankness, and if I, on account of your love, forgive you such contradictions and dissimulations, which are no great crimes, you, on account of mine, may well forgive a resolution and a sincerity which do not pretend to proceed from any stern and uncompromising virtue."

"You've more arguments at your tongue's end than I, my dear; you've been priming yourself beforehand, and can easily beat me in words. It now remains to be seen if you'll be as eloquent in your correspondence with Mlle. Vallier; for I take it for granted that you won't come to my house to carry on the war against me."

"I told you when you first came that I could not return there. It's unnecessary to forbid me."

"Then we've nothing more to say to each other. You're not willing to draw off?"

"No."

"And you entertain a hope?"

"No."

"But you act as if you did."

"Yes. And you? You are not willing to admit that I have the right?"

"Decidedly not."

"And you are going to hate me?"

"That I can assure you."

"How do you mean to manifest your hate?"

"You will see when I do manifest it. Adieu."

And he slammed the door violently, jumped into his carriage, whipped his horse furiously, and took an impassable road through the wood in the direction of the hermitage.

I let two hours go by, and then went to see M. Sylvestre: I met him on the way.

"I was going to your house," he said. "I have been having a sharp discussion with M. Nuñez. He broke his carriage and lamed his horse in getting to my place, and has now gone home on foot by the upper road. Let us go down the hill in order not to meet him. He has lost his senses, and, if he must seek a quarrel with you, let it be deliberately, at least, and after having slept upon his anger."

"You did not succeed in calming him?"

"How can you suppose it possible?"

"Do you blame me for what I have done?"

"I should have done the same. It would have been impossible for me to dissimulate even for an hour; but then I have a poor head, you know, and I am sorry that my dear *papa* is no wiser than I."

"What should I have done if I were wise?"

"What your friend Philippe advised: gone away, written from a distance, and left your cause to me."

"That I mean to do now, for I cannot take the liberty to write love-letters to her."

"Ah! for the present you must leave Mlle. Vallier in peace, and not expose her to disagreeable explanations, but wait till the storm bursts, or passes away."

"But the storm is in me, also, my dear *infant:* I am afraid that she may decide in favor of my rival."

"Then I must reassure you, and show you a letter from Mlle. Vallier, which depicts her exactly, and which I have just shown to M. Nuñez, to quiet him also. The dear child probably does not love either you or him, but — "

I hear the bell — my uncle is coming in; I will put this letter in my pocket, and finish it to-night at L'Escabeau.

L'ESCABEAU, 11 P. M.

Oh! I have ever so much to tell you: I left you at the sound of my uncle's door-bell. While I was folding my letter to take it with me, I heard two voices, and recognized Gédéon's. I had gone into the study next the salon, to write; the servant who let me in had apparently gone out, and, apparently also, the housekeeper did not know of my being there, so that my uncle and Gédéon entered the salon without suspecting my presence. A partly-open door separated us. I heard my name, and remained seated at the desk: I was curious to know what Gédéon had come to say to my uncle about me. He was talking very loud, as if excited, and related, point by point, all that had taken place between us. He saw that my uncle was much displeased at my project of marrying Mlle. Vallier, and urged him to oppose it.

"What can I do?" asked my uncle; "he is of age, and I am not his father."

"Threaten to disinherit him."

"You don't know him: he doesn't care a fig for my inheritance, especially now, since that old fool of a hermit has told him of the legacy from his maternal uncle."

"Keep back the legacy."

"I've no right to do that."

"You can easily find some impediment, some difficulty · say that your banker has run away with the money, that you are not responsible, that you are ruined."

"I cannot rob my nephew; I have never robbed anybody."

"But it's merely a feint that I suggest to save him from a folly. In three months he will not think any more about Mlle. Vallier, and perhaps she will be my wife: I hope so. Then you will tell him the truth, and he will not be vexed at what you have done for his good."

"It's too late; and besides, I'm not a liar. I spoke too soon: I was foolish; so much the worse."

"Well! Act upon his feelings; ask some service of him — send him abroad on some pretended business. I will furnish you the means to give it an appearance of reality."

"That's a good idea, though I don't like to lie, as I said before."

"Don't you want him to marry Mlle. de Magneval?"

"I should think so: a hundred thousand francs income!"

"Well! She has just got back from a short journey, and will be at my house this evening: we might invent some accident — bring about a romantic encounter. She has a spite against him, and would like to captivate him. She's so charming that he cannot possibly resist her. You may hope everything of the future, if you can only succeed in making Pierre believe, for three months, that he is ruined."

"But you seem very much afraid that he will please Mlle. Vallier?"

"Well! Yes; I am afraid. I'm jealous. Sometimes I think I see that she is in love with him. Que voulez vous? I'm forty, and he's twenty-five; he's good look-

ing, and writes well, and has just had a literary success. And then the glory of converting a man who boasted that he didn't believe in love! Women are so vain! Yes, I am afraid. Help me, and I promise you that he shall marry Jeanne."

"Well, I will write to him to come and see me. Now show me the pretext under which I can send him away."

"That's not difficult. I sent Louis Duport into Germany lately, to make some money. Send Pierre after him, on pretence that Duport can help you to recover an important debt. I will advise Duport so that he may play his part, and when the time comes, I will send him some money, for Pierre to bring back, which shall be supposed to belong to you. While he is in Germany, Mme. Duport will join her husband there, with Jeanne. Come, that's what you want, and I am here to help you."

My uncle promised, and Gédéon went away full of hope and cheerfulness, after giving my uncle the notes with which he was to mystify me; but I saved him from trying that poor trick by showing myself, telling him that I had heard every word, and making him confess that Gédéon had persuaded him to do a mean thing. He was quite angry at first, but I worked on his self-love, and succeeded in pacifying him. I was more skilful, more patient, more *nice*, as he calls it, with him, than I had ever been before. Love must soften the heart and mind, for I found persuasive words, and my uncle allowed himself to be persuaded. He doesn't like people who are richer than he, and it wasn't difficult to make him disgusted with his sudden alliance with Gédéon. Finally, if he does not yet consent to approve of my plans, he has at least decided that he will not help my adversary.

Ah! my friend, since reading that letter from Mlle. Vallier which the hermit showed me, I am full of the

sacred fire of hope. She has an invincible repugnance for the position which Gédéon offers her, and she experiences no attraction towards him personally. And yet she loves! She loves without an object, she dreams of the unknown, she aspires to family joys. It is evident that her heart wells up and overflows; and what she says on that subject is so beautiful, so good, so modest, and so true! I adore her, and I want her to know it. I shall manage to persuade M. Sylvestre to invite her to the hermitage so that I may speak with her; after which, if she wishes me to go away for three months, in order to give her time to complete her engagement and to leave La Tilleraie quietly, I will obey. If she only says: *Perhaps!* I will go away happy and confident, full of energy and submission. M. Sylvestre encourages me, even while he scolds me for my precipitation. Ah! the excellent man! It is plain that he, too, has loved, he appreciates so well the sweet fever that agitates me. He appears happy at seeing me restored to what he calls the normal condition of youth, and says that, on the very first day when I met Mlle. Vallier with him, he had a presentiment that we should love each other, in spite of all obstacles; for he believes that she will love me, he desires it, and will work for it with his whole soul. He says all this to calm me, to make me be patient, and he thinks that's the way!

Three o'clock in the Morning.

This is the day and night of adventures: while I was writing to you with my window open, I heard a horse pass at a run, along the narrow road that touches my house. I was sure, from his irregular movement, that he had no rider, and, supposing that there had been an accident, I hurried down the outside steps. I looked, I

listened, and thought I heard a faint cry, a woman's voice. Then I saw what seemed to be a human body lying upon the road, at a short distance, and ran towards it: it was only a cloak which had fallen from the runaway. I went on, and soon discovered some one seated on a large hewn tree by the side of the road. It was dark, and the place is much shaded by trees, so that I could not tell if it were a man or a woman. I asked who it was, and if there had been any accident.

"Yes, help me! my horse ran away, and threw me."

It was Jeanne's voice.

"Are you hurt?"

"No — I don't know. I am stunned, I was frightened. Help me to find Mme. Duport and M. Nuñez, who must be anxious about me."

"Can you walk?"

"I don't know; I'll try."

"And where are they?"

"They must be quite near; they were running after me."

I listened: nothing disturbed the silence of the night except the murmur of the neighboring brook, and the chirp of a cricket. It was very astonishing that Mlle. Jeanne's companions should have allowed her to get so far ahead when she was in danger. I asked her if they were mounted on donkeys; then I remembered what Gédéon had said to my uncle about an unexpected encounter, a romantic surprise. Jeanne had risen, and I could not see that it had required much effort. Suddenly, without forewarning her, I lighted a match, and looked at her scrutinizingly for half a minute, by the feeble light it gave. She was quite pale, but did not seem to have suffered the least injury: her habit showed no marks of a fall, her hair was not disarranged under her little hat, the

veil of which was not torn, nor the plume broken, and her whip had not dropped from her hand.

"Mademoiselle Jeanne," said I, when the match had gone out, "you have not been thrown, and your companions are not anxious about you: you told them what you were going to do; you dismounted here, and gave your horse a cut with your whip, which made him start at a gallop, and go off gayly towards his stable; you expected that I would fall into the snare, that I should be affected by the accident, that I would carry you to my house, or accompany you to La Tilleraie: in fine, that I would be simple enough to compromise you; after which, as a man of honor, I should be under the delicious necessity of offering you my heart and my hand. Now, I am sure that you did not do this of your own accord, for you do not love me; and if you did love me, you would have some esteem for me, and would not suppose me capable of being surprised into loving you. You have been deceived: you have been told that I was in love with you, that my pride refused to entreat you, and that, if you could bring about a favorable accident, I should be so overcome by my emotions as to fall at your feet. Therefore, as you are tired of your position, of which I appreciate the difficulties and lament the misfortune, you consented to play this wretched farce, which is distasteful to you, and which you have not been able to carry out."

Jeanne had sat down again, and I heard her sob as if her heart were breaking. Was it a feint, or could she be crying with anger? In the darkness, I could see that she had her handkerchief pressed to her face. I touched it, and found it quite dry. She perceived my movement, and drew back indignantly.

"You have nothing to fear," I said. "I only wanted

to see if you were really crying, and I find no tears. So much the better for you! They say that some women can shed tears when they choose, but you are too honest and too proud to have gone so far as that."

"Listen to me," said she, rising, "and do not judge me by appearances. You are partly right in what you say, but you are mistaken as to my purpose. If I did consent to this farce by which you have not been duped, my motives are not what you suppose. It is certainly true that I am not in love with you, and that they did try to make me believe that you were in love with me, and for some days I did believe it. My grandfather, M. Nuñez, Mlle. Vallier, Mme. Duport, — everybody about me, — tried to interest us in each other. It seemed to me that you felt nothing but antipathy to me; I said so, and they told me that you were vexed at being in love with me, and that this only made you still more in love. Perhaps that made me a little doubtful, a little coquettish, and a little curious; but you must forgive me that, for they made me lose my wits. I felt that they were, perhaps, urging me to play a ridiculous and improper part; I had my moments of clear-headedness, and consequently of anger. At last I suddenly thought I saw that you were in love with Mlle. Vallier, and I told her so: she denied it; then I accused her of deceiving me, and we quarrelled. I left La Tilleraie very much dissatisfied with everybody there, and somewhat so with myself. I came back to-day, and, this evening, after a long consultation between Mme. Duport and M. Nuñez, they proposed the foolish enterprise I have just undertaken, they promising not to lose sight of me."

"Excuse me," said I, interrupting her; "are they near us? Do they hear what you say?"

"I don't know and I don't care. I have made up my

mind to brave everything; I want to know the truth. This is why I yielded to their proposal: I thought I could see that M. Nuñez was horribly jealous of you, and that he wanted to compromise me in order to get you engaged to me; so I said to myself: 'It is time for me to see clearly into an intrigue in which those who call themselves my best friends are making a tool of me. I will see M. Sorède, and talk to him where they will not dare to interrupt me, and I will ask him to be entirely frank.' So tell me, do you love Mlle. Vallier?"

"I do not see why I should answer a question which I have given you no right to ask."

"You are afraid of being overheard?"

"No," I replied, raising my voice; "I have no secret from Gédéon Nuñez."

"But Mme. Duport?"

"Gédéon can do what he pleases with my confidences."

"Do you mean to say that you have confessed your love to him? to him of all persons?"

"Well — yes, mademoiselle."

"Then you can confess it to me — to me also."

"Yes, since you tell me that it is necessary to put an end to a ridiculous *quid pro quo*."

"Aldine knows that you love her?"

"No, she does not even suspect it."

"You swear that to me?"

"Upon my honor!"

"Then she didn't deceive me, and I was unjust to her. I will beg her pardon."

"You will do right."

"Do you want me to tell her that you love her?"

"I consent with my whole heart."

"Ah! Really?"

Jeanne, who was again seated, remained a moment without speaking; then she rose, and with evident sincerity in her voice, said:

"You are a brave and honorable young man, and Aldine is my true friend! She was sacrificing herself for me, for I am sure that she loves you. Well! I shall tell her everything we have said."

"You will be prevented."

"Prevented from doing what I wish! I defy the universe. Oh! I have a will. Allez! They don't know me. I didn't know myself before these last occurrences, which proved to me that my fate depended on my energy. My fate is a hard one, but I will overcome it. Don't think that I am bad because I say that. People think that I have broken with my mother, but we write to each other, and have a full understanding. When I'm married, I shall find a way to bring her into my new family, and to triumph over all circumstances. I know my power now; I have tried my strength during the fortnight they have been parading me about in society. I have been a horrid coquette, and have only to choose a husband from among the young fools whose heads I have turned; but I mean to have a very large fortune and a sedate man. You see that I wasn't quite so much in love with you as they doubtless tried to make you believe."

"I never did believe it."

"If you did believe it a little, it's no matter; you know me now. I'm ambitious. I have to be. If I were not, if I hadn't the will and the strength to fight against the misfortune of my birth, I should have to be a courtesan or a nun, and I don't mean to be either the one or the other. I will be rich and respected, — a coquette and virtuous. People think that's hard. I know now that it's very easy; you've only to give up love and

keep clear of romance. They are trying to get me into it, and I rebel; but this doesn't prevent me from being good, and I mean to be great. Come, give me your hand, M. Sorède; from this hour I'm your sincere friend. You shall marry Mlle. Vallier, I pledge you my word on that, and if M. Gédéon gives you any trouble, I'll avenge you."

"How?"

"By marrying him myself."

"You?"

"It's a resolution I made this morning, before I consented to this evening's farce."

"But you do not love him, poor child."

"No. But when I saw him so excited by his love for Aldine, I said to myself that the power to inspire such a passion belonged to me, and not to her."

"Are you not afraid of his hearing you?"

"No. You see that great willow-tree away down in the meadow?"

"Well! Is he hidden there?"

"Yes, with that sly fox Rebecca, who wanted to make me her tool, and whom I'll pay off sooner or later. In the meanwhile we adore each other."

"Shall I accompany you to them?"

"No; stay here and keep your eye on me. They cannot see us in the shade that covers this lonely place. I shall tell them that I haven't seen you."

"They won't believe you."

"Why not? My horse may have passed close to your house, I may have groaned, and even knocked at your door — you were sound asleep, or not at home."

"But suppose they ask me?"

"You must tell a lie, unless you prefer to compromise me."

"I will tell the lie."

"What do you think of me?"

"A great deal of good and a great deal of bad."

"You wouldn't marry me for anything in the world, would you?"

"Not for anything in the world."

"But you can be my friend?"

"Yes, if you will sometimes listen to good advice."

"We shall see. Good-by!"

She quickly gathered up the skirt of her riding-dress, jumped lightly over the narrow ditch which separated us from the meadow, cut across in a straight line through the wet grass, and was soon lost from my sight in the mist that was just rising. After gazing very intently for about a quarter of an hour, I saw three shadows come out from behind the willow, which was itself a shadow, and, in order not to be seen in case they came my way, I returned home, keeping under cover of the cherry-trees which border my road.

My lamp, which, on going out, I had left in a current of air, was long since extinguished, and I watched from my window the progress of the three shadows which were still visible on the background of the meadows whitened by the evening dew. On the road to Vaubuisson I could distinguish something that looked like horses, and the group finally withdrew in the direction of La Tilleraie by way of the valley.

It was then near midnight, and I was about to shut my window and go to bed, when I heard some light, quick footsteps upon the gravel, quite near the cottage. A sudden, supernatural impulse, a quick throbbing of the heart, a kind of magnetic revelation akin to miracle, made me run down hurriedly and cry out:

"Is that you, Mademoiselle Vallier?"

"Yes, it is I," she replied, panting. "The horse that Jeanne was riding this afternoon has come back to La Tilleraie alone. I came out with the servants; they have got ahead of me, and must have gone into the wood here. Have you seen or heard anything?"

"I know that there has been no accident. Mlle. Jeanne had dismounted when her horse ran away."

"Oh! Thank God!" said Mlle. Vallier, dropping upon the steps of her old home. "I'm suffocating."

"Let me get you a glass of water."

"I couldn't drink it. Let me recover my breath."

For some moments she was unable to speak. I could not utter a single word. I was alone with her at night on the threshold of my dwelling. It was the time to speak: when could I again find so favorable a moment? I let it escape. An inexpressible enchantment, a timid respect, chained my tongue. I was dreaming wide awake. I thought that I was at her knees, I imagined that I was talking to her; a flood of expressions, eloquent as real passion, were boiling in my breast, but my lips were mute. What must she have thought of me? All that I could do was to hold out my hand to her, when, not fully recovered from the effects of her run, she rose to go. She perceived that I was trembling, but she did not understand why.

"You are deceiving me," she said; "there has been some misfortune."

I had to swear that it was not so, in order to reassure her. She does not imagine that I am dying of love for her.

Some one came towards us, and I recognized Gédéon's groom. In reply to our questions, we learned that he had been with his master on the ride. "I am going back the shortest way," he said, "because the young

lady's horse ran away. She took monsieur's horse, and monsieur took mine. The young lady cannot ride very fast seated on one side on a man's saddle, so they had to walk their horses. That's all. Nobody has had a fall."

"I will return with you," said Mlle. Vallier, and she left me.

I did not offer to go with her, but, as soon as she had disappeared, I wanted to run after her. Why should I not have offered her my arm? The riders were returning at a walk, and I had plenty of time to see her home without any risk of meeting them; besides, the presence of the groom would have removed all danger of compromise — but perhaps the groom was in the secret of the trick that was to have mystified me; perhaps he had been told to go by L'Escabeau in order to see if I was at home, and perhaps he will tell of my short interview with Mlle. Vallier. I don't want her to be questioned; I don't want her to be exposed to the stings of a foolish and unjust spite on my account. No! No! It is not by surprise and in secret that I wish to have the happiness of seeing and hearing her! She will come to the hermitage. M. Sylvestre will consent to invite her there, and, before our common friend, before our adoptive father, I will tell her that I love her like a madman, like a child, like a brother, like a slave.

Good-night, my good Philippe; I love you more than ever these three days. It seems to me that I have never loved you as you deserve.

XLVI.

FROM PIERRE TO PHILIPPE.

L'ESCABEAU, 6 August.

PERHAPS I shall never see her again! Ah! Why did I not say to her last night when she was here: "Let us love each other and fly together!" Nuñez would have pursued us, but I should have had one day of happiness, one day in which I should have heard her say: "I love you!" But I am crazy! She cannot love me, she does not know me; I have always shown myself to her so different from what I really am! So much the better! If she did love me, I should be a coward, and this is not the time for that.

This morning, when I went to M. Sylvestre's, in order to make him promise to obtain for me an interview with her, I found Gédéon there, very much excited. He had come to reproach M. Sylvestre, and the old man replied firmly that he considered my right to contend for the hand of Mlle. Vallier as indisputable. He spoke so reasonably, and with such good sense, that Gédéon was shaken for a moment, but he soon appeared to be all the more irritated because he felt that he was in the wrong. Louis Duport, who had arrived from Germany unexpectedly in the morning, was there also, trying to calm him, but doing it very clumsily, for he wanted to persuade Gédéon to give up Mlle. Vallier, whom he called a calculating

coquette, *with two strings to her bow.* M. Sylvestre defended his young friend warmly, and they were really disputing when I entered. Not knowing what had taken place, I was compelled to wait until spoken to, and the sudden silence with which I was received was embarrassing. M. Sylvestre was visibly disturbed by my presence, and immediately said to Gédéon: "We will resume this discussion when you please, monsieur. For the present, I am engaged, and am going out with M. Sorède. I bid you good-day."

He took me authoritatively by the arm, and we were on our way out, when Gédéon, carried beyond himself, and in a veritable frenzy, rushed towards me to strike me. He is physically much stronger than I, but I believe that I should have killed myself if I had received a blow, for, even had I washed it off in his blood, I should never have dared to present myself before Aldine, disgraced by the hand of my rival. The fear of such an insult gave me tenfold vigor: I threw Gédéon to the ground, and kept him under me like a child, but without insulting or striking him; then I left him, almost fainting with stupor and rage, in the arms of Duport and M. Sylvestre.

I returned home to await the result of that scene of violence, really not knowing which of us owed reparation to the other, for if Gédéon had intended a brutal attack, he had suffered the humiliating consequences, and we were quits.

Louis Duport soon arrived with M. Sylvestre. Gédéon demanded a duel; he called himself the offended party: whatever might have been his intention in rushing upon me, I had not been satisfied by parrying his attack, but had thrown him down, had held him on the ground, and torn his clothes; this last was what offended him the most, though M. Sylvestre reminded him that it was not

I, but his dog, who, when he saw me threatened, had flown at Gédéon, and would have bitten him had not I prevented it. In spite of what M. Sylvestre said, Louis Duport accused me of brutality, and demanded reparation in behalf of his friend. M. Sylvestre insisted that the matter so presented was ridiculous and absurd; that Gédéon was the aggressor, and that, if there must be an encounter, I had the choice of arms.

"Let us not discuss the point," I said to him; "an encounter is inevitable. It would be useless for me to make any allowance for M. Nuñez' anger, as he is determined to drive me to that extremity. I cannot wait for fresh insults, and, though I was perfectly master of myself, and did not provoke him in any manner, but merely defended myself from his fury, I accept any conditions he may choose to demand. Please, therefore, to act as my friend. I presume that M. Duport will act for M. Nuñez, and I subscribe beforehand to whatever may be determined between you."

Duport said that Gédéon did, in fact, claim his assistance, and that he could not refuse him; but he was not sure that I was serious in proposing M. Sylvestre, who was a philosopher, opposed to duelling, and probably but little versed in the practical management of such affairs.

"Excuse me, monsieur," replied the hermit, drawing himself up, "I have served; I fought at Waterloo before you were born. I know how to respond to all the exigencies of life, and I acknowledge that, in order not to remain exposed to the outrages of a man who has lost his senses, M. Sorède must perforce fight with his former friend. There might be some discussion between us as to the real author of the offence, but you see that M. Sorède does not raise any question, and it is our duty, as men of honor, to equalize the chances."

"For my part, gentlemen," said I, taking my hat, "I know that I must not interfere any further. I therefore leave you together."

I went out to take a walk, and, strange as it may appear, I had but one wish, which was to complete my article for the "Revue Cosmogonique," for which I had been paid in advance. If I am killed, my historical work, at least, must be complete, and in it I want my real thought to appear, for I have hitherto been too reserved on that point. I shall say what I now think I understand: Happiness has never been defined, and cannot be; each man forms an idea of it which is peculiar to himself, and even this varies according to the state of his mind; nothing is happiness, properly speaking, and everything is happiness to a fully living soul; therefore, the question is, not to seek after happiness, but to develop life which gives it to us, humble or magnificent, ardent or calm, ecstatic or sweet, as it gives us talent or genius, according to the organization which we possess. And I may well add that, for youth, the true and the best employment of life is love!

On returning home, I found M. Sylvestre alone, much depressed at first, for he loves me, dear man, and I believe that he will regret me greatly, if any misfortune happen to me. On seeing me so joyous at having reached my solution, he recovered his courage. He consented to dine with me, and we discussed and philosophized for two good hours. He is not dissatisfied with my formula; he would like to have me make a reservation in favor of absolute happiness in the future, but I am not so far advanced as yet. "Give me time to grow old," said I, "and perhaps I shall come to believe, with you, that man is indefinitely perfectible, on feeling myself to be perfectible. Certainly, if I employ my life well,

if I know the joys of partaken love, if I have children, I shall become better, more active and more intelligent than I now am. Who knows if I shall not be sufficiently purified and sufficiently advanced to think like you, when I shall have attained your age?"

I had entirely forgotten that I am to fight to-morrow, but was reminded of it on seeing the hermit turn away to hide two big tears which swelled in his large black eyes. Yes, my friend, to-morrow, at five in the morning, our quarrel is to be settled near the hermitage. Gédéon is a good shot with the pistol, and I know nothing about it; but we are about equal with the rapier, and this has been fixed upon as our weapon. Our friend, the surgeon-doctor, is to be caught as he gets out of bed by Gédéon, who will bring him in his carriage. Everything is arranged and provided for. I feel quite calm. Certainly I shall be very sorry to kill Gédéon; I comprehend his anger so well! Therefore I am delighted to be able to offer him my life instead of the sacrifice he sought to impose upon me. I can do no more, and, if my heart be afflicted, my conscience, at least, is satisfied.

11 o'clock, P.M.

I have just finished my article, and am well satisfied with it. I am going to bed. I feel tired, and must rise early. If I were wounded — would she come to see me? No. I am not her brother. Ah! Why am I not her betrothed!

The 7th, 4 A.M.

I have slept well. I have sealed up my manuscript, and shall take this letter with me; it will not be sent till after the duel. I have made my will, and divided between Mlle. Vallier and you the little fortune which my uncle holds for me. You will provide for the hermit; I

trust to you. I shall regret life; it is just beginning for me, but love has initiated me into the mysterious feeling of hope. If I die, I shall have an easy death. Perhaps there is something beyond! Who knows? Yes, love carries in itself the idea of infinity. Adieu, friend of my heart! The birds are waking, and the horizon is lighting up. The morning is beautiful, the weather fine. To die! Shall I die? Allons donc! It is impossible! Jeanne told me, "She loves you"! If it were only true! Ah! I should like to have a good wound; then she would come, out of charity.

XLVII.

TELEGRAM — M. SYLVESTRE TO PHILIPPE.

HERMITAGE, 7 August, 6 A. M.

COME immediately. Pierre severely wounded — at my house — wants you.

XLVIII.

TELEGRAM — PHILIPPE TAVERNAY TO HIS MOTHER AT VOLVIC.

HERMITAGE, 8 August, 7 P. M.

PIERRE alive — very low. While there's life there's hope.

XLIX.

GÉDÉON NUÑEZ TO M. PIERMONT AT PARIS.

LA TILLERAIE, 10 August, 8 P. M.

YOUR visit did him good. The night was passable. Hope, sir. He wants nothing. I see to that.

L.

TELEGRAM — PHILIPPE TO HIS MOTHER.

HERMITAGE, 12 August.

SAVED! I answer for him. Am well, not fatigued. Be easy.

LI.

Philippe to his Mother.

The Hermitage, 12 August.

I SENT you a second telegram this morning, to let you share my joy as quickly as possible; and, also, to reassure you respecting myself. My patient slept last night, and I consequently was able to sleep also. I am very well situated: these two rooms at the hermitage are quite large, and M. Nuñez had a full outfit for an ambulance brought here in a few hours. The hermit and I divide the severer labors of the night. That old man is perfectly wonderful! He is the most enduring, the most active, the most encouraging of all those who help me. Noble old age! What a recompense for a good life!

I should also say that Mlle. Vallier is indefatigable. She reached the hermitage an hour after the event; she anticipated it: she had guessed it the day before from M. Nuñez' agitation, and on the day itself, from his early departure, which she had remarked. The hermit told me that, at the moment, he did not think Pierre would live two hours. The sword had gone nearly through his body, and the prostration was complete; the surgeon had no hope. When Mlle. Vallier entered, M. Nuñez was sucking the wound. I must tell you, by the way, that this furious animal is the best of men — when he is not furious. He certainly wanted to kill his adversary, for

he pushed his sword with the greatest rage, and, as soon as he was avenged, he was horrified at what he had done, and tended Pierre as if he were his own son. When he saw Mlle. Vallier, he said to her frantically: "There he is, look at him! He is dead, I have killed him! Hate me! I detest myself!"

Mlle. Vallier made no answer. She bent over poor Pierre, and, in the presence of them all, kissed him on the forehead; then she sank into a chair, and the hermit thought that she, too, was going to die. Gédéon said to her, in a low voice:

"Then you did love him! You ought to have told me so."

She did not appear to hear him, but, rising with energy, she threw off her hat, cloak and gloves, and went to work like a sister of charity. She was not willing to leave the bedside before my arrival, and had been up for thirty-six hours when I found her there. M. Nuñez and M. Duport had been running night and day to get whatever was needed, and afterwards had gone to Paris to bring me here. I did not succeed in persuading Mlle. Vallier to take some rest until yesterday, and then only by remonstrating with her, and telling her that, as I should perhaps require her assistance for a long time, she was very wrong to incur the risk of getting ill. Then she went to the inn at Grez, where her negress, to whom she had sent word, was expecting her, and where she slept some hours. Notwithstanding Gédéon's extreme and sincere repentance, she does not forgive him. She has not uttered a single word of reproach, but I can see that she has a horror of him; she replies only by monosyllables when he tries to talk to her, and, when he wanted to persuade her to return to his house, she crushed him by a

repeated *No*, so calm, so cold, and so decided, that he no longer dares even to look at her.

Poor Pierre, when he fell on the field, cried out: "A moi, Philippe," as if he felt that I could save him. M. ———, the great surgeon, was brought from Paris, but was unwilling to give an opinion, and limited himself to approving the treatment pursued. Finally, last evening, the respiration became normal, the eyes retired, the pulse beat regularly, and I was able to probe the wound throughout without fear of having the patient expire under my hand. No important organ is injured, the inflammation is gradually subsiding, and his sleep was real and sound. At three in the morning he tried to speak, but could not make himself understood; he looked at me without surprise, and, by almost imperceptible signs, gave me to understand that he had already heard and recognized my voice. Another pantomime seemed to express that another voice had reached him, and his eyes, which had not yet recovered their clearness, appeared to question me. At that moment, Mlle. Vallier, who had gone away at ten o'clock, returned with a little lantern, having courageously come alone through the still, dark wood. She went up to look at him, and he saw her. Ah! my dear mother! What a sweet ray of life does the presence of a beloved woman enkindle on the face of a man who has been struggling with death! Pierre is handsome, as you know, but you have never seen him, you never will see him as I did, with his Christ-like pallor, his great hollow eyes, his young black beard curling upon his sunken cheeks, and that half smile, supreme effort of a joy which cannot yet manifest itself, and which is akin to suffering. He could not speak. Aldine took his hand in hers.

"Well?" said I to her. "Kiss him, then. He is saved."

She kissed the hand she held, and felt upon her brow two tears which seemed to herald resurrection. Lazarus must have shed those two regenerating tears when the voice of the *Friend* called upon him to rise and come forth from the tomb. Pierre was just able to speak; he whispered: "I should like to die now." I authoritatively bowed the head of his beloved upon his: she dried his tears with her lips. And now let anybody tell me that he will not live!

I have commanded silence; she is seated by him, holding his head on her shoulder, and warming his hands in hers, while I write. Ah! I am very happy! and I know that you will so rejoice in my joy! I embrace you with my whole soul, dear mother. We shall now be quiet, and I shall soon be able to write to you at leisure, and give you the details in a little better order. He sees that I am writing, and signs to me to kiss you for him.

LII.

From Philippe to his Mother.

The Hermitage, 14 August.

SINCE you want to have the complete history of our dear boy, you can add my letters to his, which I gave to your care, for now I am his historian until further orders, though I cannot give an account of the slightest beat of his heart, as he did. I am but a poor narrator, and you would not learn anything from the technical bulletins of the physician; but I will tell you in a few words that the improvement is wonderfully sustained, that we are beginning to feed him in order to bring back his strength, and that, thanks to his youth, his remarkably pure previous life, and his good constitution, I expect to get him on his feet again in a very short time. I shall do my very best, knowing that you do not like to live without me, and having no desire myself to pass weeks without seeing you.

Mlle. Vallier is always here from morning to night, and prolongs her stay whenever the patient experiences any discomfort or agitation. But he is a model patient; in fact, enduring suffering with unimaginable patience, and submitting to everything like a child who has no fear of death, and who obeys in order to please his parents. He said to me yesterday, looking at his beloved: "I never

thought that I should die. I felt that she was by me. A man loved by her cannot die."

I have to impose silence upon him, for he is inclined to talk more than I wish; but I talk to him, and so does the hermit: we tell him what *she* has told us. It appears that she has always loved him: from the day that he declared she was ugly, when she was quite a child, she has never dreamed of any one else; and yet she knew nothing of him but the sound of his voice, and his insults. This romantic prepossession became a strong feeling, and grew still stronger when she met him here, when she watched with him by the hermit's bedside; but she has always thought that he did not care for her, and there were even days when she mistook his jealousy for aversion. She loved him, notwithstanding, and thought that she was working for his happiness, and for M. Sylvestre's satisfaction, in trying to promote his marriage with Jeanne.

Apropos of that famous Jeanne: I have seen her. She has been here twice to get news of Pierre, first with her chaperon, Mme. Duport, and afterwards with the demoiselles Nuñez. She is a very beautiful person, who does not please me *one bit*, as we say at home, any more than the gorgeous Rebecca. Neither of these two stars of the toilette has any more heart than the other, and Mlle. Vallier showed her goodness, rather than her perception, in cherishing so generous a friendship for the hermit's granddaughter. The hermit was the first to get his eyes open; he now feels certain that he has no part in this child, and has said to me several times:

"It would be very foolish to trouble ourselves about her. She is stronger than any of us; she hasn't a spark of sensibility or imagination; she will make her place in the world, and, in the world's view, it will be a very fine place. I hope that her selfishness will keep her virtuous.

"Be happy! I leave to-morrow. I was insane; I have paid dearly for it. I deserve my punishment."

I interrupted them: "Have you anything more to say to each other? Must I retire? I cannot give you more than five minutes. Pierre must not fatigue himself."

"He has kissed me," replied Pierre. "That is all I wanted."

Gédéon went away, saying to him:

"You are more worthy than I."

Good-night, dear good mother. You see that this sad journey, which you feared so much, has given me none but sweet experiences, and that I shall return as much an optimist as ever.

LIII.

From Gédéon Nuñez to Mlle. Vallier.

La Tilleraie, 15 August, 4 a.m.

I LEAVE in two hours. You will never see me again. Be merciful, and try to forgive me. I accused you in my heart, but Jeanne has proved to me that you did not deceive me, since you were ignorant of the love of the man whom you love. And, besides, you never encouraged me; it was I myself who invented my deplorable delusions. I have expiated them severely! Therefore do not curse me. Pierre will give you an example of generosity.

I leave my children in charge of my sisters. I have found a governess for them; she will come to La Tilleraie in a week. Will you not have an eye to my poor orphans until then? They are innocent of my crime, and you love them. They ask for you every day, and Sam cried when he was told that you would not come back. Be magnanimous. Adieu!

LIV.

From Mlle. Vallier to M. Nuñez, by return of the Express.

[illegible], Five o'clock in the Morning.

I WILL [illegible] children every day until the arrival of my [illegible]

LV.

Mlle. Vallier to Philippe Tavernay, at Volvic.

Hermitage, 2 September.

DEAR DOCTOR: Your departure occasioned some excitement, and consequently a little fatigue, but nothing serious, for we have talked about your promised return all yesterday and to-day. You know that it is ardently desired, and that we are not to be married except in your presence. You are the angel of our salvation; M. Sylvestre says that he loves you as a son; he speaks the truth, and he is right. M. Piermont came to see his nephew to-day, for the third time; for the third time he climbed the hill without complaining much, and for the third time, also, he told me that I was very poor, but that he did not esteem me any the less for that. How would it be if I were rich!

The governess has arrived at La Tilleraie, and consequently I am no longer obliged to go there every day. I have received a triumphant letter from Jeanne: M. Nuñez detests her; therefore she concludes that he adores her. The Diamant family have also been here. They have found for us what we were looking for, and better than we hoped: it is the pretty rose cottage of the village of Grez, at the foot of the hill, which you wanted us to have. You liked its rustic garden, its broad view over both valleys, and the close screen of wood which protects

it from the north wind. The owner has decided to let it. Our patient will pass the autumn pleasantly there, and perhaps we shall remain through the winter. M. Sylvestre, who does not wish us to be separated, consents to live there with us until our marriage. The Diamants say that we can buy it, if we find we like it, and we have a dream of keeping the hermit there with us, but we say nothing to him about it as yet. He loves his hermitage so much that we shall probably have to compromise, and try to persuade him to sleep under our roof, even if he pass his days there. La Tilleraie is for sale. We shall have no acquaintance with the purchaser, so that our solitude will not be disturbed. Mme. Laroze, whose business is not profitable, talks of selling out and becoming our servant. I desire this very much; Zoe is not strong enough to do anything but sew, and then Mme. Laroze has been so devoted to the hermit and to Pierre, that I love her with my whole heart.

Adieu and au revoir, dear and worthy friend. Pierre wishes me to kiss you for him and for myself, which I do quite willingly, I assure you. He promises that we shall go into your mountains in the spring, and that your mother will love me too. M. Sylvestre no longer likes journeys, but says that he will undertake another in order to visit you.

Be blessed! That is what I shall say all the days of my life. Zoe blesses you also; you have completed her cure. Farfadet looked for you a whole day. M. Sylvestre gravely said to him: "Be quiet! He will return."

Farfadet resigned himself, and you would not like to be the cause of the hermit's telling a lie for the first time in his life, even to his dog.

LVI.

From Pierre to Philippe.

Les Grez, 15 September.

I am strong enough to write to you. I am even strong enough to have come down the hill on foot to take possession of the rose cottage. It is paradise to be here in this charming little corner, with *her* and with the hermit. Ah! let me hope that you will come here to live, in order to complete my universe! I want to be too happy! That is due to me, who have waited so long even for the belief in happiness; but what a compensation I am now having! I live in joy while anticipating ecstacy! My idle days pass like hours. I thought it impossible for me to live without action and without reflection. Delicious weakening of my system! Everything affects and charms me. I have bursts of childish gayety, and tears also, which flow from an excess of well-being. I am not yet quite sure that I am not dreaming. She loves me, she is here, she always will be here, and always busied about me! Night has hitherto separated us; henceforward she will sleep under my roof until she sleeps upon my heart. She will be with me in the morning watching my awaking, passing her cool hand over my moist brow, and reading in my eyes the happiness of renewed life! She will work by my side, and with me. We shall say that we love each other all the day long, without wearying the patience

of our old friend — that angel of tenderness, who blesses us with an eternal smile, and whose presence sanctifies in us that which is itself sanctity. I feel as calm as if I need only permit myself to float upon a river of milk. The storms I have gone through are like vanished phantoms. Death gave me a cold kiss, and said, "I am the languor of delight, and I come to you that you may enjoy the expectation of the future instead of devouring the present."

Dear friend, if you only could see how I am loved! But you have seen, you do know, and you know by whom. Is she not the only beautiful woman, the only one who is both tender and strong, intelligent and modest — the only one who knows how to love? There is something in her which strikes me like a fresh discovery, which opens to me a new world. It is the bravery of her character. At every hour, and quite unconsciously, she reveals to me a practical good sense, which I have sought in vain through continued and futile reasoning. She is wise by her very organization, and is energetic without effort, just as men live and are strong. I was wondering at this with the hermit: "Can you comprehend," I asked him, "a human being who never complains and who never seems to suffer?" I was greatly struck by his reply: "The human species," he said, "is divided into two classes: active and strong souls, who seek their happiness in that of others; and delicate, effeminate souls, who demand happiness without knowing how to confer it. Reflect upon this, for it belongs to your study. The life of the first is spent in forgetting to live, in order that they may maintain the brilliancy and the fire of life in others. Useless labor! The latter accept the sacrifice and do not profit by it. This is the rock in the realm of feeling on which happiness may be wrecked: too much

self-sacrifice on one side, too much ingratitude on the other. You can thus see that there is need of a society which, instead of representing the struggle between these two extremes, will know how to produce an equilibrium between them, and to prevent one-half of the human race from being eternally sacrificed to the other."

"Friend," said I, "do not talk to me of the human race. Talk to me of the woman I love. Is it she who is too self-sacrificing? Is it I who will be selfish, mean, and ungrateful?"

"No; for you will teach her what happiness is; she does not really know. All her life has been one cruel trial, and her character has taken the cast of sublime but exaggerated resignation. She has accustomed herself to believe that her misfortunes are the will of God. Destroy that notion. God never condemns the innocent to unhappiness. Do not let her be hard upon herself, as she is but too much inclined to be. Love her so well that she will come to love herself on your account. Friend Gédéon, who, with good instincts, belongs, nevertheless, to the class of the unconsciously selfish, would have sacrificed her unwittingly, because, in seeking her, he never thought of anything else than having a companion wonderfully fitted for the requirements of his life, and the demands of his position. When speaking of his love he never once said to me, 'My object and my ambition is to give happiness and freedom to a saintly young woman who has never known aught but slavery and poverty.' He never thought of it. Thus what he called love was only calculation — calculation ennobled by a feeling of gratitude, indeed, but still calculation — like everything originating in those hard, strong, Jewish heads. If I inclined the balance in his favor for a few moments, it was because I did not clearly understand his nature; I required Aldine's

letter to find out the secret of the indifference which he could not overcome, and which he never would have been able to overcome, even if she had married him. She would only have sacrificed herself to duty. Oh, my dear child, do not ever become what most men do become when God grants to them a companion so constituted! Do not be satisfied at seeing her submissive and faithful because of her virtues; for it is happiness you want, after having so long sought in the regions of philosophy for that ideal which God has placed upon the earth, precisely as He has placed here the cedar and the rose. Admire the vast foliage of the tree, enjoy the fragrance of the flower. Do not say that it is your due more than that of any other; but think every day how you can deserve it, and do not go to sleep once in your life without thanking the Author of all human felicity. He has not created such or such of His blessings for your individual benefit; He has strewn them all over life, and has given you a heart to understand and to enjoy every gift of His infinite munificence."

It is thus that that this pure and really pious man talks to me. I no longer harden myself against his belief: I love it; I may come to share it; for why should I not? I almost promised him this on the day before the one on which I was so nearly killed. Shall I become rebellious when I have recovered my strength? I do not know, but I do not believe that I shall. It seems to me that this manna with which I permit myself to be fed, is renewing my being, and that, on the day when the energy of complete health shall reanimate my faculties, I shall feel with delight that I have become tender, and that this is more necessary and more true than to be strong.

One thing I do know with certainty — tiens! it is a picture with which I intoxicate myself — it is that, on the day when I shall see in the arms of my wife a smil-

ing, questioning child, who says to me, as they all do say: "Father, where is the good God?" I shall place my hand upon the defenceless heart of the little child who thus lisps its first curiosity, and shall say to it, "My child! God is there! It is that which loves, and which causes love!"

LVII.

From M. Sylvestre to Philippe.

Les Grez, 4 January, 1865.

I HAVE received with gratitude, my dear son, the New Year's wishes which you commissioned our friends to express to me on your part. I prefer to reply thus to them in order to give you a cordial shake of the hand, and to tell you of those whom we love.

Yes, they will submit to your prescription — they have no right to refuse, for they owe life to you — they will not be married before spring. Pierre's health is improving day by day, but the winter retards the complete restoration of his strength, and he has still to contend with that slight nervous fever which reappears from time to time. What you prescribe for the body, I would gladly prescribe also for the soul. To know how to wait for happiness is to render one's self worthy of it. The apprenticeship of respect towards the woman is the virtue of the lover; it is the moral dowry of the husband.

You close your letter with a sentence to which I find it necessary to reply: "I hope that the hermit will convert him completely to a belief in spiritual truth."

My dear son, the hermit is not a converter. It is true that I maintain my opinion when called upon to talk, but I generally prefer to strengthen and enlighten it in myself by listening to others. I am a very patient old

dreamer, you know why. I always say of truth as of happiness: "It is within and without us, and it is especially *beyond* us."

My expectation of light in the future is so strong, that the shadows of the present never discourage me. I have a firm conviction of my own doctrine, but no doctrine irritates me, unless it be one of the dead doctrines of the past. I do not know if our friend Pierre will ever become a believer in the sense that you and I, and Aldine, are believers. It is a great deal for him that he is no longer so affirmative in his negation, and that he can say with feeling: "Who knows?" His intellect is in love with truth, and the uprightness of his heart is so great that, in him, doubt is the scruple of an honest man, and not the refuge of incapacity. This intellectual disposition troubled me when it threatened to react upon his appreciation of persons and things. When carried too far, scepticism makes one distrustful, and then it becomes a misfortune and a disease. Love has preserved Pierre from this, and his heart is cured; he will know how to be happy. The admirably good woman who has assumed the charge of his life, will not let him again fall into a horror of living; but, though circumstances do modify us, they do not transform us in a day, and I should have a poor opinion of any man who passed at one bound from doubt to enthusiasm, as we sometimes see weak-minded and demoralized persons throw themselves into mysticism in order to escape from imbecility or madness.

No. Holy philosophy, holy truth, does not perform miracles, and such conversions would not be worthy of her. There is not in the past any refuge from the implacable demands of the future, and, whatever form the eternal doctrine of spiritual truth may take, it will never

have the right to impose itself upon any human conscience like a coup d'état upon a society tired of anarchy, or like a phantasmal revelation upon a sick man worn out by want of sleep. The intellectual man must himself seek his reasons for believing or disbelieving, and the influence of others should be limited to inducing his reflections. Surprised faith is not faith. We must leave to the capuchins and fashionable preachers those conquests of the ignorant and weak-minded — real cup-tricks — in which the poor, buffeted reason is hardly of more account than the pith-ball of the juggler.

It is quite possible that our friend may never believe, in an absolute and complete manner, what we believe. Well! do not be disturbed by that, my son, and do not imagine that he is therefore any less worthy than we are. Those rigid intellects which are unwilling to yield at all to hope, and which feeling never entirely subdues, have an intrinsic value quite equal to those which are open to the ideal. Man is only too much disposed to illusion, and it is good that those who have strength enough to resist it should hold us back on what may be a dangerous declivity. For my own part, while I dream of the future harmony between reason and poetry, I am well content that there are in our day strong and ardent representatives of both these separate forces of humanity; and, without losing any portion of my own faith, would willingly cry out: "Make room for the atheists!" Are not their faces, like ours, turned towards the future? Do not they, like us, fight against the darkness of superstition? And ought we, instead of joining forces to overthrow our common enemy, to lose our time and waste our energies in trying to exclude each other from the field of battle?

No, my son, we ought not. The sceptics and the athe-

ists are our brothers; they are bringing materials for the new temple. Do not say that negation creates nothing: it creates the idea of liberty of conscience — the foundation without which nothing can be built. As for me, who, like you, have long felt the fervor of an apostle, the nearer and nearer I advance towards the grave, the greater and greater becomes my need to extend my hand to all those who are turning back, and who, for fear of the light, are about to plunge themselves into the dreadful night of the middle ages. The nearer I approach to death, the more convinced am I that such men are fools, and dead, and that they are burying themselves in fear and falsehood. What! They expect to go to God while they are cursing life! They think that they become deserving of eternal life by denying the life of humanity! They cut off their wings that they may fly better! They damn their fellow men, and think to make God their accomplice!

What shall be said of hell — that ridiculous and monstrous invention of the ages of barbarism? Is it not the duty of each of us, idealist or not, to cast the shovelful of earth which is to close that infamous gate, and to bury that "sorrowing city" in oblivion? Oh! youth! youth! come quickly and help us! Rather than believe in the malevolence of God, deny His existence! We do not care for such denial: He will always manifest Himself. He will manifest Himself in your own selves, whether you be conscious of it or not. Your boldness and energy are sufficient proofs, in spite of your protest. If one could doubt, it would be because you get tired of protesting — because you make yourselves old with the doctrines of bygone ages, dead with the doctrines of death.

This is what I should say to our friend Pierre, if I saw him passing through the conflicts of the day with indiffer-

ence, and succumbing to that need of rest which has destroyed so many souls in this age in which we live. I would then say to him: "Be an unbeliever again rather than selfish. God does not love cowards."

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